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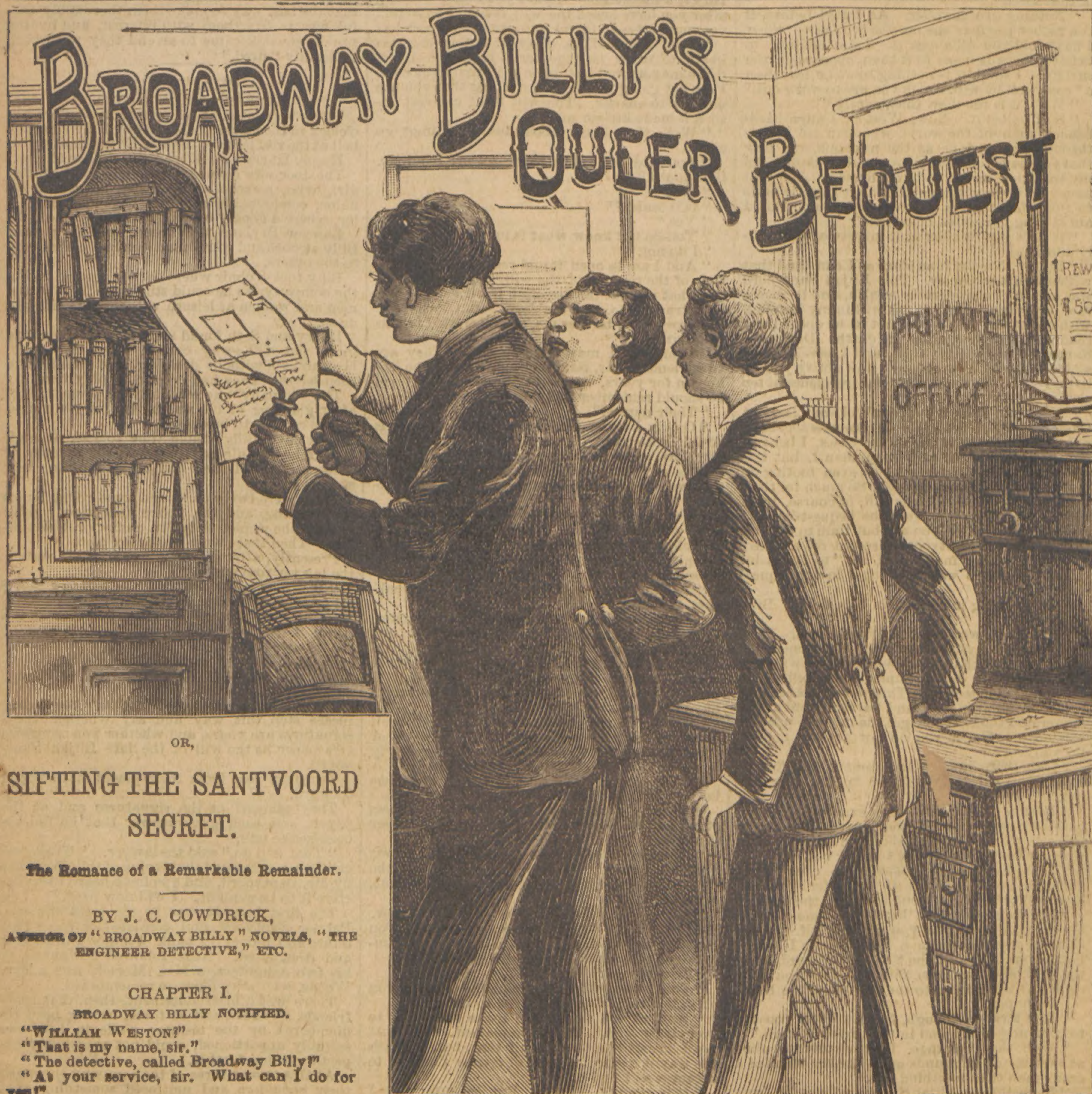
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OR,
**SIFTING THE SANTVOORD
SECRET.**

The Romance of a Remarkable Remainder.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, "THE
ENGINEER DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BROADWAY BILLY NOTIFIED.

"WILLIAM WESTON?"
"That is my name, sir."
"The detective, called Broadway Billy?"
"At your service, sir. What can I do for
you?"
"Can I have a few minutes with you in private,
Mr. Weston?"

BILLY PROCEEDED TO USE THE VAPORIZER UPON THE APPARENTLY BLANK PAGE—
HIS BEAGLES WATCHING INTENTLY.

"Certainly, sir. Boys, step outside while the gentleman makes known his business."

It was one forenoon, and Broadway Billy and his "team" were in the office talking over a case when a stranger entered.

He was a man of middle age, well-dressed, and one who had business "snap" about him. He made known the object of his visit without delay in the manner quoted, and as soon as the boys had gone from the room, said further:

"My name is Bryland and I am a lawyer. There is nothing so very secret about the business which has brought me here, but I thought it just as well to speak of it in private. The fact is, you are legatee to a rather peculiar bequest in the will of the late Elijah Santvoord."

Broadway Billy allowed his face to express something of his surprise.

"I suppose you knew Mr. Santvoord," the lawyer went on. "A person rarely leaves a legacy to a stranger."

"The person seems to have done so in this instance," responded Billy. "I never knew this Elijah Santvoord, and the name is one I never heard before to my knowledge. What is the nature of the bequest? Is it a farm, or something of that sort?"

"Nothing like that, sir. As I said before, it is a rather peculiar one, as you will agree when I have told you all about it. I am inclined to believe there is more to it than appears on the surface. I think it is nothing more or less than a 'case' left by will, which you are to work out."

"Well, it is peculiar, then, surely."

"So I called it. Now, Weston, I am a hard-headed man of the world, who can see as far through a grindstone as the next one, and now that you have told me you never knew Santvoord my suspicion seems to be confirmed. And that suspicion is what I have said, that there is more to this affair than is exposed on the top. But, I am talking in riddles, of course."

"It isn't just as clear as it might be, yet," Billy admitted.

"I'll try to make it as clear as I can, and that without further parley. This Elijah Santvoord was a man of considerable wealth, and he died a few days ago. He left his will in my keeping, with directions that it was not to be opened and read until one week after his death. Day after to-morrow will be the time, and I have notified all the legatees but you, and I now notify you, to be present at Mr. Santvoord's late residence at ten o'clock on that day."

"Now, you are a detective and I am a lawyer. Cases sometimes bring our professions together, so to speak. Here is one of the cases, I believe. You are a much younger man than I, but this places us upon something of an even footing in this instance, if I may say so. So much for that. I know the contents of this will, of course, but I have hinted to no one what the bequests are. I am not going to tell you all, but I am to tell you this, since Mr. Santvoord directed me to do so: 'Tell the young man,' said he, 'to be on his guard, for there will be danger in my bequest for him.'"

"I am getting interested in this thing," Billy declared.

"Not to be wondered at, young man. Your bequest, the mystery aside for the moment, is one thousand dollars; but whether you will ever receive it or not depends upon your ability as a keen-scented detective. This money has been inclosed in an iron box and carefully hid away. If you find the box you get the money, while if you do not find it you do not get the money. Do you see?"

"I see there is some inducement laid for me to bend myself to the task of finding this iron box."

"That is it, sir; that is it exactly. The bequests of two others of the legatees are in the same box, and it depends upon your ability whether they ever receive them or not."

"There has been, I suppose, some clew left to guide me in my search? If not, I fear the outlook will be rather discouraging for the heirs."

"Not heirs, sir, but legatees. These others are no more heirs than you are yourself. Yes, I have in my possession a letter which I am to hand over to you at the time of the reading of the will, and I suppose that will give you clew sufficient to lead you to the finding of the box."

"Perhaps."

"It is strange, though, for this letter you are to open and read aloud in the presence of all."

"Well, that is strange. It grows more peculiar at each step. It sounds more like the whim of a crazy man than anything else."

"Nevertheless, Elijah Santvoord was far from being crazy. He was sound in mind, but was rather peculiar and eccentric in many things. His will is all straight, and will stand law."

"It is needless for me to assure you that I will be on hand, sir. My curiosity has been awakened, and I'm eager to find out more about the matter. It is strange that Mr. Santvoord selected me for such a task as this, when I never saw or heard of the man in my life."

"Proof that he was sane enough. He knew what he was doing."

"What do you mean now?"

"He knew the man he was selecting. You are making a name here in New York, Mr. Weston, and no doubt he knew that, aside from the reward of a thousand dollars, you would push the case at your best for the sake of the case itself."

"Perhaps. Is that all, Mr. Bryland?"

"That is all. Do not fail to be on hand at the time and place I mentioned. Here is the street and number."

He jotted the address upon one of his cards, and laid it on the desk of the young detective.

"I have already assured you on that point," returned Billy. "And now," he added, "before you go I would like to ask some questions regarding this matter."

"Well, I hardly know about that, young man. Isn't it a little soon? Hadn't you better wait till after you have heard the will read? I have told you more already than I set out to tell you."

"You have said, in effect, that this case was likely to draw us together," reminded Billy. "We may as well look upon it in that light now. I am not going to ask you anything that you are not free to answer. The will itself can rest until it is made known to all."

"Well, if it is not about the will direct, go ahead."

"You said you hold a letter for me from Mr. Santvoord."

"Yes."

"Is it sealed?"

"Yes."

"You do not know what is in it?"

"I do not."

"And I am to open it and read it aloud at the time of the reading of the will?"

"That is what the direction is, sir."

"Strange, to say the least. But, who are these two who, besides me, are interested in this iron box?"

"I suppose I may tell you that. They are two friends of Mr. Santvoord, men whom he had known for years, and whom it was only natural he should remember in his will."

"Their names?"

"One is Baptist Hodgerson and the other is Abiel Trotterman."

"Now, what is the interest they have in the iron box? But, you have forbid that. Of course they will be interested in the progress I make toward finding it."

"Yes, for, as I told you—their bequests are with yours in the box. They will, undoubtedly, pay close attention to your search. That would be only natural. It is no more than I shall do myself."

"You have a grain of woman's besetting weakness, too, eh?"

"If you mean curiosity, I have, in this matter. I must say it goes ahead of anything of the sort I ever met with."

"It is certainly peculiar. But, are we three the only ones to whom he has left anything? I believe not, however, according to the way I have understood you."

"There are six names in the will, all told. Three of these are a son and two daughters of the deceased. To these the bulk of the property has been left. Certainly all his real estate."

"Then you are not able to guess what has been willed to the other two?"

"Hang it, young man, I am not on a witness stand for cross-examination, am I?" the lawyer demanded.

"Of course not," answered Billy; "but it was my inning and I was only trying to get all the points possible. You can't blame me for that, can you?"

"No; but I can't give you any more, now. You will have to curb your curiosity till you hear the will read, when you will be able to understand what is necessary you should."

"I suppose so."

"That letter will no doubt make plain to you all that Mr. Santvoord desired to know."

"And at the same time make it known to everybody else," Billy complained. "I must say I do not like the idea of that, but, if that's the way it has to be, why of course I'll have to accept it as I find it."

"It is curious, isn't it? But, enough; here I am prattling away like some old woman. My business here is done, and I'll be off. You can see my reason for telling you of this in privacy;

if you want to keep it secret you can do so. I'll bid you good-morning."

The lawyer had straightened up and buttoned his coat with much dignity, and with his last words he turned to the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bryland!" Billy responded. "It will be just as well for you to keep it from the others that my name is mentioned in the will."

"I have done so, sir."

"Very good."

So the lawyer passed out, and when he had gone Happy Harry and Silent Seth returned.

"Well, I s'pose he let out what he had to say so mighty secret," Harry made remark. "Is it another case, boss?"

Silent Seth had taken a seat as silent and stoical as ever, but Harry was on the hunt for information to gratify his curiosity, and made no bones about it.

"I think it promises to be a case, boys," was Billy's answer. "What it will amount to, however, is more than I can say. There are several peculiar features about it, as you will see."

With that, Billy went ahead and told them all about it, the boys listening to the story with keenest interest throughout. Billy knew well that the best way to make them thoroughly useful was to fire them with interest, and by the time their talk came to an end they were both sufficiently "fired."

CHAPTER II.

EVERYBODY MYSTIFIED.

Two days later, at a few minutes before ten o'clock in the morning, Broadway Billy rung the bell at the residence of the late Elijah Santvoord.

Happy Harry and Silent Seth were with him.

The door was opened by a bright-eyed colored girl, who, as soon as Billy had mentioned his name, conducted him and the boys into the parlor, where a goodly company was assembled.

Lawyer Bryland was there, and he greeted Billy at once and introduced him in a casual way to the others.

Billy took a chair where he was partly facing the company, so he could study the faces of the men and women at leisure without appearing to do so.

Harry and Seth found seats together on a sofa in an out-of-the-way corner, where they could hear and see without drawing any attention to themselves. They had no part to play here.

The company was evidently all present, but, after glancing at his watch, the lawyer waited before coming to business.

This gave Billy ample time to look around, though he had already observed the number of persons gathered there and taken a passing look at each one.

There were two women and some young ladies in mourning, and the young detective rightly guessed the women to be Mr. Santvoord's daughters. Then there were five or six men.

Presently, after glancing again at his watch, the lawyer rose and said:

"It is now after ten, and the legatees being all present, according to Mr. Santvoord's wishes, we will now proceed with the business of the hour. I will read the last will and testament of the deceased."

He took from his pocket a legal-looking document, and opening it and spreading it out, called:

"Mr. Cyrus Durand and Mr. Henry Burringer, please step this way and say whether these signatures are yours, and whether you recognize this paper as the will of the late Elijah Santvoord."

Two men rose from their places and stepped forward.

They glanced at the signatures and at the paper, and each gave answer that he did recognize the will.

"That will do," said the lawyer. "These two gentlemen witnessed the signing of this document by Mr. Santvoord, and you have heard them declare it to be genuine. I will now read."

The first bequest was to the testator's son, Palmer Santvoord, and consisted of some real estate and money in bank, definitely described and designated. Next followed the names of his two daughters, a Mrs. Morsely and a Mrs. Woods, who were likewise remembered.

There was a brief statement, then, that some friends, servants, and so forth, having been remembered by the testator while in life, and suitably apportioned, could not reasonably expect anything further.

At this two or three of the company shrugged their shoulders and muttered something that could not be overheard.

Then came that part of the will in which Broadway Billy was interested.

"To my dear friend, Baptist Hodgerson," the lawyer read on, "I do give and bequeath all and several of certain papers contained in a sealed envelope to his name addressed, the same to be found securely locked in an iron box which I have taken pains to hide away in a secret place. And to my wronged friend, Abiel Trotterman, I do give and bequeath a certain paper to be found in a sealed envelope and to his name addressed, the same being likewise in the iron box aforesaid."

The lawyer paused for breath and looked around over the company.

Broadway Billy had been watching the faces before him while the lawyer read, and at mention of the name Hodgerson he noticed that one man gave a start and was at once keenly alive with interest.

Then, at mention of the name Trotterman, another started with a surprised and puzzled expression, looking first at the lawyer and then at the man Hodgerson, whom he sat beside. And it needed no introduction for Broadway Billy to know who these two were.

"And to the rising young detective, William Weston, popularly known as Broadway Billy," the lawyer resumed, "I do give and bequeath the sum of one thousand dollars, together with a sealed letter, the whole to be found likewise in the iron box aforesaid, which it shall be his business to recover and bring to light. But, be it understood that these bequests are conditional, as follows: These three are to open the iron box in the presence of one another and of other witnesses, when the sealed papers must be read aloud in the hearing of all; the iron box, after its discovery, to be held meanwhile by the said William Weston as sole custodian, he having power to name the time and place for the opening of the same."

The lawyer made another pause, to note the effect of all this upon the company.

Broadway Billy, watching particularly Hodgerson and Trotterman, noted that the former grew slightly pale and uneasy, while the expression upon the face of the latter grew more and more puzzled.

The whole company was filled with curiosity, by this time, and individuals were exchanging glances with one another, wondering what it all meant. The bequests were strange, to say the least. Could it be that Santvoord had not been in his right mind?

"And here is the ending clause," said the lawyer:

"To the said William Weston, for his guidance in his search for the hidden iron box, I leave a sealed letter addressed, in the keeping of Lawyer Bryland. This letter the said William Weston will open and read before the assembled company at the time of the reading of this my last will and testament."

Following this came the closing paragraph of the document, in which the son of the deceased, Palmer Santvoord, and Lawyer Bryland, were appointed executors.

"And that is all," the lawyer said, as he folded the paper and returned it to his pocket. "The will is all right in every respect. Here, Mr. Weston," producing a sealed envelope, "is the letter referred to."

Broadway Billy rose and took the letter from his hand, and turning to the company, said:

"You have heard, ladies and gentlemen, the conditions upon which this letter has come to me. I will fulfill the conditions by opening the letter here in your presence and reading it aloud."

He tore off the end of the envelope and drew out its contents.

There were four sheets, pinned together at the top with a paper-fastener. The front and back sheets were of heavier paper than the two within, as though intended for covers.

The papers were twice folded, and on the front of the cover was this brief direction:

"Preserve carefully intact."

This Billy read aloud, and turned to the next page.

Here was found the letter proper, but it was quite remarkable for its briefness. It read as follows:

"TH WILLIAM WESTON, Detective:—

"You will, of course, require a clew to enable you to discover the hidden iron box. Very well. If you do not find it here, look there."

"ELIJAH SANTVOORD."

Broadway Billy knit his brows in something of a frown over this brief and puzzling direction, and turned to the next page to see if anything further was to be read.

There was nothing more! The remaining pages were blank, and although he turned the

papers over, examining them on both sides, there was not another word anywhere. Everybody was mystified, and undoubtedly with good reason.

"Is that all it says?" asked the lawyer.

"That is all," answered Billy. "Do you think I will find the iron box?"

"It is hardly probable, if that is all the clew you have to work upon, young man. What do you think about it?"

"If you will notice, this letter speaks only of the clew. The clew is not here, but I am to look for it. Once that is found, I imagine the rest will be easy."

Just here Mr. Baptist Hodgerson broke into a light laugh.

"I think I see through this thing," he declared. "It is only a joke which Elijah has seen fit to play upon us."

Mr. Trotterman shook his head.

"I can't agree with you in that, Baptist," he disputed. "Elijah was too serious during the last year to indulge in jokes. I look upon this as something serious indeed."

Broadway Billy listened attentively to these remarks, and watched the manner of each man narrowly.

"Can you give us any light upon it, Palmer?" the lawyer inquired, turning to the son of the deceased Mr. Santvoord.

"None whatever, sir," was the response.

"You never heard your father say anything about this iron box, or these peculiar bequests, eh?"

"Never a word. If any one knew anything about it, it should be you, who drew up the will for him. Didn't he say anything about it to you?"

"Nothing in the way of explanation. I made the remark when drawing up the will that it was a very unusual manner of making bequests, but he allowed that he was the testator and that he knew what he was about."

"But, there can be nothing to it," declared Mr. Hodgerson. "I cannot imagine what he should want to leave to Abiel here and me, in so mysterious a way."

"Nor I," joined in Mr. Trotterman. "Still, I think he must have been very much in earnest."

"But, why should he be so very mysterious about it? Here he has put the iron box away in a safe hiding-place, where no one is likely to find it by chance, and has employed this young man to find it for us."

"I do not know, I do not know. It is wonderful, to say the very least about it."

"And what are you going to do, young man?" Hodgerson asked.

"I am going for that thousand dollars, of course!" answered Billy. "I must look for this clew until I find it, and then recover the iron box."

"I know, I know; but, where are you going to look?"

"Why, the direction is plain enough, surely, sir. If I don't find it here I must look there. One thing: Mr. Santvoord has made no secret about this letter; you all know as much about it as I."

The business of the occasion being done, the company broke up and fell to talking in groups of two and three, of which Lawyer Bryland, Palmer Santvoord, and Broadway Billy, made one. The matter was discussed freely, but the mystery about it could not be penetrated.

Finally, when Broadway Billy and his "team" took their leave, Billy was as much mystified as ever, and on the way back to the office he had little to say, but he was thinking, and thinking hard, too.

CHAPTER III.

STUDYING THE SITUATION.

WHEN the trio entered the office, upon their arrival there, Silent Seth sat down in his accustomed place and rested his chin between his thumb and finger, with his elbow upon his knee for support. This was the attitude he generally assumed when anything puzzled him and he wanted to do some deep thinking.

Not so with Happy Harry. No sooner had they come in than he advanced to the furthest corner, where he began to butt against the wall with considerable force, thus to give vent to his feelings.

Broadway Billy looked at them for a moment, and then broke into a hearty laugh.

"Why, what's the matter with you two?" he demanded. "Are you trying to butt your brains out, Harry? Are you going off into a seal-brown study, Seth?"

"Christopher Columbus!" cried Harry, stopping his capers to respond. "Just as though I

have got any brains to knock out! It's only because I haven't any that I'm kicking myself."

"And you call that kicking yourself?"

"Well, it 'mounts to the same thing, and I can do this a good deal harder. I feel that I'm nothin' but a howlin' idiot."

Billy laughed again.

"And what's the matter with you, Philosopher?" to Seth. "You look as though you had tackled some great problem that baffled the sages of old. Speak up, and let's know what's troubling you."

"You know well enough," Seth responded calmly.

"Course he does," echoed Harry, promptly.

"You are puzzled over this Santvoord case?" Billy suggested.

"Who wouldn't be puzzled over it?" cried Harry. "Ain't it enough to make a Japanese joss shed salt, sad weeps? How in the world are we ever going to find that iron box with never even the shadow of a shade of a clew?"

Billy laughed.

"I see you are both troubled," he remarked. "Can't you suggest something, Silent Seth, as a kind of starter?"

"Not a thing. I'm puzzled over that letter. What does he mean by telling you if you don't find it here to look there?"

"That is the first problem to be tackled, my youthful sphinx, and there is the secret of the whole affair, I believe. But, let's talk it over carefully and see what we can make out of it."

So saying, Broadway Billy took his seat at his desk, while Harry dropped upon a chair near Seth's.

Billy drew the mysterious letter from his pocket and studied it carefully, commenting upon it aloud as he did so.

"In the first place," he mused, "I am cautioned to preserve these papers carefully, intact. That means, they are not to be taken apart, or mused, or soiled in any manner. By this, I take it, Mr. Santvoord meant to impress upon me the importance of them, little important though they seem."

"That's straight, boss," decided Harry.

Seth nodded his approval.

"But, where does the importance lie? That is the puzzle. There is a trick about this I am sure. And it was not intended wholly for me, either, else I would not have been required to read this letter aloud before the company upon receiving it. What do you think, boys? Can't you throw some light upon it?"

"Might, if I had brains in my thinker instead of soapuds," Harry made response. "You are gettin' at it all right, seems to me. You are puttin' into words what I couldn't put into thinks, try as I would. But, ask the Stoick here, he may be able to guess the riddle."

"Your brain is all right, Harry," Billy encouraged. "We have got hold of an exceedingly knotty problem this time, that's where the trouble lies. But, Seth, what have you to offer?"

"If you don't find it here, look there," responded the silent boy, with an air of abstraction.

"That hits it, I guess," Billy mused. "If I don't find it here I must look there. The fact of the business is, he has given me work to do. If I want to corral that thousand dollars I have got to untie a pretty hard knot. I'm like the king's fool, who was sent there, without knowing where, to bring That, without knowing what. Boys, we have got a tough nut to crack here, and no mistake about it. Do you think we shall get there?"

"I wish you'd take and 'prentice me out to a hodman," exclaimed Harry. "I think my weight of intellect would fit me for that business nicely."

"Don't be too rough against yourself, Harry. This thing stumps me as badly as it baffles you and Seth. Now, I'll take one more look at the letter, and if I don't get any light then I'll give it up for the present. 'You will, of course,' he says, 'require a clew to enable you to discover the hidden iron box.' He is right, there; no man living could discover it without some clew to guide him, if he has hidden it away in a secret place as he says. 'Very well,' he adds, 'if you do not find it here, look there.' Sweet petaters! If it isn't enough to make a mule kick!"

"I should say it was!" cried Harry. "Say somethin', Seth, if you ever did. If I don't get relief somehow I'll be a gibbering idiot the first thing you know."

"If you don't find it here, look there," repeated Seth, as solemnly as an owl might have said it, could owls talk.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem! Seth, I've a notion to

brain ye on the spot! That means that we have got to scour the world with sandpaper. And if we don't find it, why, just keep on till we do. Oh! I have had enough of detective business, boss; I think I will go and hire out to a street-sweep, and take my board for my clothes."

They were still talking about the strange matter, and were no nearer a solution to the problem than at first, when the door opened and Lawyer Bryland and Palmer Santvoord entered.

Immediately the two boys retired to a distant corner and sat down, leaving their master to deal with the callers.

"Well, have you had time to think over that peculiar bequest?" asked the lawyer, laughing.

"Plenty of time," answered Billy. "I can't make anything out of it yet, however."

"It is a strange affair, as I told you. That letter did not enlighten you much, either, did it?"

"If anything, it has made the matter more difficult, for where I expected to get a clew I have only been told to look for one."

"Had I not been with father to the last," spoke up Palmer, "I should certainly think he had been out of his mind. But, I know he was not; his mind was clear to the very last."

"Did he say anything to you about this?" asked Billy.

"Nothing more than to say he had made his will, and that it was in the keeping of Bryland. And he said he wanted it carried out to the very letter."

"There is something back of it all, that is positive," averred Billy. "I must go into it and sift it out somehow. Something may turn up to throw light upon it, when once I get down to work in earnest."

"It is to be hoped so, for I am filled to running over with curiosity," remarked Bryland. "I never met with anything like this before in all my experience. But, we merely dropped in to say that, as executors, we want to be kept posted regarding what progress you make in the matter, and if you do find the iron box, then we want to be present at the opening of it."

"Very well, gentlemen; I'll do as you request. I would certainly have called you to be present at the opening of the box, anyhow. But, the box has not been discovered yet, nor the clew to the finding of it."

"What do you think about it, anyhow?" Bryland asked.

"The same as you yourself, answered Billy. "That there is something deeper than appears at first sight, eh?"

"Exactly. Looking at the matter on every side, I have come to this conclusion: That Mr. Santvoord died with a secret, but one which he has made known and has left in the iron box, to be published by his friends Hodgerson and Trotterman. He was, perhaps, afraid to trust the box to the keeping of any one, and so took this means of disposing of it."

"That sounds as though there may be something in it," ventured Palmer.

"It is mere speculation, mind you," reminded Billy. "What the secret is, who can say? But, I am of the opinion that it concerns his friend Trotterman, for you noticed, perhaps, that in the will he speaks of him as his 'wronged' friend."

"Yes, I noticed that," Palmer observed; "but Mr. Trotterman himself is very much puzzled. He says he has no knowledge that he has ever been wronged by my father. Neither has Hodgerson. Both were my father's closest friends for many years, particularly Hodgerson."

"Had your father any enemy that you are aware of?" Billy inquired.

"He had not, sir."

"I wonder who it was he was afraid to trust?"

Billy looked at the son closely as he put the question. Perhaps he had a suspicion it was he?

"Afraid to trust?" Palmer repeated.

"Yes; he had some good reason for all this precaution about the secret of the iron box. It seems he did not take a single soul into his confidence regarding it, and that looks as though there was some one in particular whom he would not trust."

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure. Bryland here and I talked about it with the two friends, Hodgerson and Trotterman, after you came away, and they are as much puzzled about it as we are. We cannot do anything, either, except to trust to you to unravel the secret for us."

"And it looks very doubtful about my being able to do it, I must confess. The first step in the case is to find the clew, and the directions left for my guidance to that are anything but clear. If I don't find it here, I'm to look there. Did you ever hear of anything more peculiar

than that? What is meant by Here? Where am I to look for There?"

"It is bewildering, true enough," admitted the lawyer. "But, one thing is quite evident: The deceased had confidence in your ability as a detective, and he no doubt believed you would be able to get at his meaning."

"And I'm afraid he rated my ability too high," Billy declared. "If anybody can give me the key to this riddle, I'd like to have it."

Certain it was that neither the lawyer nor his companion could do that, and after a time they departed.

When they had gone Billy and the boys talked the matter over more fully, but it baffled them completely, and finally they were obliged to lay it aside for the present and turn their attention to other matters. Whether Billy would ever be able to clear up the strange case or not, remained to be seen.

CHAPTER IV.

BEGINNING THE BUSINESS.

It was some days before Broadway Billy could devote any time to the new and interesting case. Other matters claimed his attention, which had to be cleared up before anything else could be undertaken.

But, finally, these were cleared away and another signal victory scored; then the detective trio were ready for the new case.

Billy had not been altogether idle during this time, however, for he had given the case much thought; but, with all his thinking it still baffled him.

There was that more than mysterious letter which the dead man had left for his guidance. If he had left none at all, Billy thought, he would have been as well off as now.

One sentence kept ringing in his ears all the time—"If you do not find it here, look there."

Was there any sense in that?

He doubted it.

Yet, here was the caution to preserve the papers intact, and surely that would not have been put there if they were of no value. He had thought and thought, but it still baffled him. Now, however, he was ready to give the case his undivided attention.

Leaving Harry and Seth at the office one afternoon, he paid a visit to the Santvoord residence.

His ring at the bell brought the same bright-looking colored girl to the door, and he inquired for Palmer Santvoord.

Palmer was younger than his two sisters, and was as yet unmarried. He and his father had lived together during the old man's lifetime, and now Palmer occupied the house alone.

He had only a housekeeper, a woman of middle age, and this young colored girl, for his servants.

The name of this colored girl was Rosa Polkadot, as Billy had learned, and she was as bright in mind as she was in appearance.

"Yes, sir, he is in," she made response to Billy's inquiry.

"All right. Tell him Mr. Weston wants to see him," Billy directed.

"Yes, sir; I know who you are, sir."

"You remember me, eh?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"You are good at remembering faces, then, I take it."

"Yes; I don't have to see a puss on but once to know him again. I have got a good memory, sir."

She talked with only a slight touch of the usual "darker" dialect. Billy made up his mind to make her useful in this case before he was done with it.

He was shown into the reception-room, and the girl reported.

Presently Palmer Santvoord came down, and greeted Billy quite warmly, as he remarked:

"Well, I suppose you are here to begin work upon that mysterious affair of the iron box?"

"You have guessed it," Billy assured.

"I have been expecting you. Have you yet made anything out of the queer letter father left?"

"Not a thing. It is still an unsolved enigma. Something about it savors of madness, and were it not that both you and Mr. Bryland assure me that your father was perfectly sane, I should ascribe it to a disordered brain."

"Let me assure you again that father was perfectly sound in mind."

"And you have told me that he said nothing to you respecting this iron box. Do you not regard that as very strange?"

"Well, yes and no. Yes, for he always made a confidant of me in most matters; and no, since

it seems he wanted to make this matter a secret profound. No one knew a thing about it until the reading of the will."

"It is a singular—a very singular affair. I have come here to have a thorough talk with you in regard to the matter."

"Very well, you will find me ready enough to talk with you, for I am very eager to have it cleared up, I assure you."

"I do not doubt it. Have you seen anything more of Hodgerson, or Trotterman, since the day the will was read?"

"Yes; both of them. Hodgerson calls here daily, the same as he did when my father was alive. They were close friends, you know. Trotterman has been in once or twice, and I have seen him at his own house besides."

"They were both close friends of your father, and are friends to each other, I understand."

"Yes."

"You have not been able to find in what way Trotterman had ever been wronged, eh?"

"No; and it is a mystery not only to me but to him and Hodgerson as well. We have all talked it over, but can get no light upon the subject whatever. Some remarkable things have been brought to light, however."

"Ha! that statement is encouraging. What are these facts?"

"You remember the paragraph in the will which spoke of some gifts having been made to friends, servants, and so forth."

"I recollect it."

"Well, it seems father gave Trotterman a considerable fortune some days before he died, and really insisted upon his taking it. Trotterman refused at first, but father threatened to sever all friendly relations unless he did take it, so it was accepted."

"A considerable fortune, you say?"

"Yes; about a third as much as he willed to me and my sisters all together. I had always considered father worth much more than was named in the will, and wondered what had become of it."

"Here is a clew, then."

"Where?"

"In the statement you have made. The wrong that had been done to Trotterman was something in money matters, and this gift has made it right."

"You think so?"

"Does it not look so?"

"That I admit; but, how is it the man knows nothing about it?"

"It would be possible, somehow, for the wrong to have been done without his knowledge. A look into the history of these persons will perhaps clear it up. Now I begin to see light ahead."

"You may be right, but it's all a mystery to me. Now there was Hodgerson, who was father's most intimate companion, why would father have kept it from him?"

"If it was something of a criminal nature, is it likely that he would have revealed it to any one?"

"No; but that is out of the question. My father was honest to the penny. He was as honest as the sun. You must not think that of him."

"Very likely so, but you have not known him all his life. He lived a considerable number of days before you were born. There may have been something in his young days—"

"No, no, I cannot believe it. It would be wrong for me to do so."

"Let us drop it at once. Have you been thinking any about this queer letter he left for me?"

"It has hardly been out of my mind an hour, sir."

"You have found no way of explaining it, though?"

"No."

"I have told you what I think about it. We must give up the idea that your father was not in his right mind. In fact, this gift to the wronged friend seems to prove that. What I need is the clew he left. If I do not find it here I must look for it there. I have not found it, so where am I to look?"

"Alas!"

"You have expressed your willingness to help me in any and every way in your power."

"So I have, and I mean it, too. In fact, father told me to render you all the help I could."

"Ha! something more to work upon. This is growing slowly, Mr. Santvoord. How came your father to mention me to you?"

"It was in connection with something else."

"And what was that something else? You see, in my line every point is of help, and oc-

asionally it is the most trifling thing that is of the utmost importance. If you really want to help me, do not hold anything back."

"I am sincere enough in what I have said, and I will tell you everything I know. In fact, father told me to trust you fully; and not only so, but to lend you all the aid I could, secretly, he said, though I do not see the need of that."

"Ah-ha! We are coming to something now, Mr. Santvoord, as sure as you live. Your father was far from mad when he made that will. Yes, tell me everything you can, and so help me to get a grip upon the mystery to unravel the tangle. Here is a secret to be sifted."

"Well, there is a woman in the case, as usual."

"There is seldom any trouble going on that hasn't a woman in it somewhere," observed Billy, laughing.

"So it is said, I know; but this particular woman has nothing to do with the trouble, in this instance. She is the daughter of Abiel Trotterman. Her name is Lucrece. I love her, and would seek to marry her, but—"

He paused.

"Is it the same old love romance?" asked Billy. "The stern father says nay, and so the loving couple languish in despair?"

He said this in a joking way, and the young man laughed.

"It isn't that way," he said. "Mr. Trotterman would be willing, I know, but the objection has come from the other side. And here is what I set out to tell you: Before he died, my father called me to him and asked me if I loved Lucrece. I told him I did. Then he went on and said that under no circumstances must I ask her to marry me till after your work had been accomplished."

"More light still," mused Billy. "We are coming at it, Mr. Santvoord. But, you said he did not mention me to you, did you not?"

"Not by name. He called you a certain detective whom he had engaged for a certain work. I should learn all about you, he said, at the time of the reading of the will. Of this I was to make no mention to any one, unless to you, positively. There, Mr. Weston, you have the whole matter, so far as I know anything about it. You can readily see that I must be anxious to see the matter cleared up."

CHAPTER V.

SOMETHING TO WORK UPON.

ANY one well acquainted with Broadway Billy could have seen that he was now considerably hopeful about the case.

Things had been brought out which, if they did not throw much light on the mystery, at least served to furnish material upon which to build a beginning, and the young detective was not slow to recognize them.

There were some points easily summed up. Mr. Santvoord had called his friend Trotterman his "injured" friend. Before death he had made him accept a large sum of money. It looked as though at some time he, Santvoord, had in some way injured him to that extent.

Then, too, he had forbidden his son to marry Trotterman's daughter till after the mystery of the iron box had been brought to light and everything cleared up. Here was further proof that the wrong done had been no trifling one. If Billy read aright, he fore-saw some bar to the union which would only appear upon the opening of the iron box.

Here was something to work upon, but not much after all.

Billy recounted these points aloud for young Santvoord's consideration and comment.

"I agree that it looks as you say," the young man coincided, "but that only makes it all the more of a mystery, for no one can understand in what way father has ever injured Trotterman."

"No one will understand, either, till the iron box is brought to light."

"I suppose not, and for that reason, if no other, everybody is eager to see it produced. And that rests with you. If you cannot solve the mystery of that letter, no one can. Have you done everything possible toward finding out what the meaning of the letter is?"

"I have tried everything I could think of. I must turn my attention to the mystery itself. Not finding it here, I must look there."

Young Santvoord looked up quickly.

"Have you not hit upon it in jest?" he asked.

"That is, in not being able to find the clew hinted at in the letter, I must look to the deeper mystery itself?"

"Yes."

"I hardly think so. There is a clew in this letter, but I have failed to figure it out. There is a hidden meaning which I have not been able to unearth and understand. Take it and study it—"

"Oh! I have been doing so, as I told you. It is all a blank to me. Besides, if you can not work it out, no use my trying."

"Your father rated me above my ability, I am afraid," Billy declared.

"It proves he had great confidence in you. No doubt he read all about you in the papers, and so made up his mind what you could do."

"If you see it in the papers, sir, it isn't always so, no matter if they claim it is. I am afraid they have rated me too high, and that I'll never be able to hold up my end. But, that aside, this letter is a dead letter for the present. We can count nothing upon it. Did your father leave no word with you for me?"

"None, sir."

"He hinted at no way in which you might help me?"

"No. I took it that you would have the matter all in hand, and would be able to direct me."

"You will obey his wishes in respect to the young woman whom you love, I suppose?"

"I shall strive to, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well, you see, I have a rival, and I will not stand idly by and see him step into the place I covet."

"Hal! another complication. Who is this rival?"

"It is Mr. Conrad Hodgerson."

"Hodgerson again? A son of your father's friend Baptist?"

"Yes."

"Then you and he are not friends, I take it."

"We are not foes, so far as I am concerned, but I intend to beat him in this matter if it lies in my power."

"I can see that your father has handicapped you. While you are idle, this other is no doubt free to make love to the young lady, and he may get her promise while you are doing nothing."

Santvoord's face clouded.

"You'll excuse me for speaking plainly," Billy added.

"That part is all right enough," was the response. "It is pretty much as you picture it, worse luck."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Santvoord. Somehow I take to you and like you. Perhaps I can put in a word in your behalf. Anyhow, I'll do it if I can."

"No, that would never do. I must fight my own battle—"

"That is all right, but I can do something here which would be altogether a delicate thing for you to do yourself. I can let the young lady know, in a casual way, what your father has required of you."

"But, you do not know her."

"No matter, I will make her acquaintance. I am going to make the acquaintance of every one connected with the affair, and so work it out. The explanation is somewhere, I know; I need only to get hold of the right end to unravel it."

"Well, do as you will about it. Father told me to trust you, and I'm going to do so. Now, is there anything I can do to help you in your work?"

"I was going to ask you if you had made a thorough search of the house for that iron box."

"Not a place as big as a mousehole, sir, but I have explored it."

"And have you looked among his papers for some father clew?"

"I have done that, too. I have done everything that has come to my mind, but all to no purpose. I believe you have the only scrap of paper that is worth anything, and that seems to be as good as nothing. I feel discouraged."

"Don't feel that way, sir. I have the strongest kind of hopes, now, after this talk with you. You have given me something to work upon, and I think I can bring the solution after awhile. I did think of asking the privilege of exploring the house, but since you have done that it will be useless."

"I'll take you through—"

"No, I'll take your word for that. You know the house thoroughly, and if you could discover nothing there is no use of my searching. I'll take my leave now, and if anything new turns up I'll drop around again and talk it over with you."

"I'll be only too glad to have you do so. And, if I hear of anything I'll let you know."

"Yes, do so, by all means."

They passed out into the hall, and young Santvoord led the way to the front door.

Billy was behind him, and it was with a good deal of surprise that he felt something slipped into his hand from behind, but instinctively his fingers closed upon it.

He was quick to look, too, and saw Rosa Polkadot just in the act of turning away from him.

Billy said nothing, but passed on, and after a few words with young Santvoord at the door, went out and away.

The thing that had been put in his hand was a piece of paper, as he knew at first, and he did not look at it till he had turned a corner.

Then he unfolded it and examined it with all eagerness.

He had been puzzled to know what manner of communication this colored girl could desire to make to him.

As he read it he was more surprised than he had been on receiving it in the first place. The strangeness of it was not lessened in the least.

It read as follows:

"MR. WESTON:—"

"You may trust Rosa Polkadot. She may be of service to you. Judge of her by what you have seen, and by the manner in which she delivers this note to you. Follow directions of letter carefully for the finding of the clew. ELIJAH SANTVOORD."

To say that Billy was profoundly surprised hardly expresses it.

Was the dead alive? It did not seem possible that Mr. Santvoord could have written such a note before his death—that is to say, before he knew whether Billy would take the case or not. Yet, how else could it be?

And if not written by him, then by whom, and with what object?

That was hard to answer. But, Billy had seen the dead man's writing, and there did not seem to be any doubt about the genuineness of this!

"There is something doubly strange about this," he said to himself. "The old fellow must have felt pretty certain that I would act for him. And, he must have had more confidence in this colored girl than in even his own son. That is strange, too. Have I placed too much confidence in Palmer?"

He considered that point.

"No, he did not think he had made any mistake in estimating the character of that young gentleman."

"This certainly is a deep affair," he declared—just so deep I am not able to touch bottom apparently; but, I'm going to get there if it takes all the rest of the year!"

He turned it over in mind carefully as he walked in the direction of his next point of destination.

"Yes," he mused, "I have now something to work upon. That Mr. Santvoord had wronged his friend Trotterman seems clear enough to me. He has made the wrong right as far as he could. Perhaps it is his confession that is concealed in the iron box, and in order to make me determined to find it he has baited the trap with a thousand dollars. He did not know me, for I would work just as hard for the mere sake of clearing the riddle up. But, the thousand dollars will fit in nicely, too—if I get it."

He laughed to himself, as that part of it struck him forcibly.

And then came again to mind the peculiar direction in the letter he had received from the lawyer:—"If you do not find it here, look there."

In due time he rung the bell at the residence of Abiel Trotterman, and it was answered by a pretty young woman whose identity Billy guessed at once. He took it to be Miss Trotterman.

"Do I mistake in supposing you are Miss Lucrece Trotterman?" he asked.

"You do not," was the gracious answer, accompanied with a rosy flush of her cheeks. "And you are Mr. Weston, the detective?"

Billy was a little surprised that she should know him, but it quickly came to him that she had been one of the young ladies present at the reading of the will on that occasion, so he acknowledged his identity, and making known his business, was invited to enter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HODGERSONS IN CONFERENCE.

"GOOD heavens, father! Is this true, this you tell me?"

"Do you suppose I would waste time and breath telling you a lie?"

"Well, no; but just think of it! Why, it gives me power— But, pshaw! you have only been getting off a huge joke, just to amuse yourself at my expense."

"Don't be a fool, Conrad, and don't take me

for one. As for your power, I guess the shoe will fit on both feet alike. Don't brag yourself upon your power while I am on deck."

The Hodgersons, father and son—alone together in the library of their finely-furnished home.

The younger man was pacing the floor in an agitated manner, while the elder was leaning back in his chair looking on with steady gaze.

"Then it is true?" the young man repeated.

"Just as true as that I have told it to you."

"That, then, is the secret of the iron box?"

"It undoubtedly is."

"And to have that box discovered means—"

"It means ruin and death, nothing more or less, for me."

"And that being so—"

"That being so, the iron box must never see the light of day," spoken with almost fierce decision.

"How will you prevent it? That young Weston is a very imp at detective work, and he will as surely unearth it as that he lives."

"We must not allow him to do it. He has got a name, I know, but he is a son of Luck. I don't believe the young man has half the ability he is given credit for."

"I don't know about that. He could not impose upon such a man as the police superintendent if he had not something to back him."

"Well, no matter what he is or is not, he must be beaten this time. We must fight him, boy, to the death if need be, and wrest that box from him if he finds it. I am not sure he is going to find it, though. See the meaningless direction old Lige left him, will you?"

"Are you sure it was meaningless?"

"It is Greek to the detective, anyhow, and he will never make anything out of it."

"Can you?"

"No. Who could? 'If you do not find it here, look there.' What sense is there in such lingo as that? None at all."

"And yet there must be a hidden meaning in it somewhere, since the old man was undoubtedly thoroughly in earnest about it. But, afraid of you, he has made it as secret as possible."

"Yes, and too secret for any one to solve."

"Are you sure the young fellow read it all aloud. Is that positively all the letter contained?"

"I had it in my own hands, afterward, and read it for myself. He read every word of it aloud. There was no trick about that part of it."

"Well, for my part I don't see what sense is to be made out of it. There is certainly no meaning in it, unless there is a further clew to be found somewhere. But, can't we find that box ourselves?"

"How?"

"You ought to be as able to do it as that detective, since he has no more information than you have."

"I don't know how to go about it. I put young Santvoord up to search the house from top to bottom, and he could not find it. No use for me to go there and look."

"I suppose not."

"Besides, it won't do for me to appear too interested, you know."

"There would be no harm in that, since you and Santvoord were such close friends, and the less, since there is something in the box for you."

"You may be right, after all. But, how and where could I look? I don't know how to take the first step."

"And I can't tell you, that's sure. But, one thing I do know, if there is a cool thousand dollars lying loose in that box I'm going to have it if I can lay hands upon it."

"Well, and how do you propose to accomplish that?"

"Do you think it would be a bad idea to let the detective do the work, and lie in wait for him to find the box and then wrest it from him?"

"That would be well enough, but I doubt if you could play the detective upon a detective."

"If I couldn't, I know who could."

"Who?"

"Tim Rittlers."

"Hal just the fellow we want in this case! Used to be a detective, but fell from grace, and now is ready to pick up a hundred at any sort of job that falls in his way."

"That's Tim Rittlers, to a T. I know him well, and I know where to find him. How will it do to go and see him and take him into the thing with us? He might be able to unearth the iron box and so give Weston the shake."

"A good idea, boy, and we'll act upon it. But, there's one thing to be observed."

"And what is that?"

"Our secret must not fall into his keeping."

"Well, I should say not. He'd sweat us to death if he got hold of that."

"And you know the sort of man he is and must guard your talk accordingly. A detective himself, he will want to know all the particulars of the whole affair. He must not be allowed to learn them."

"You needn't fear me. I flatter myself that I am cute enough for him, every time."

"I'm only warning you, that's all. Then, there's another thing."

"What now?"

"Lucrece."

"Hal! I am going to take care of Lucrece, dad."

"I hope you won't meet with any defeat in your intentions, that's all. The girl is worth the winning, now."

"She always was."

"Doubly so now, then, since fool Santvoord left Trotterman a third of all he was worth. Gave it to him in person, I mean. There is a fortune goes with the girl, you see."

"I'm not blind to that, and if I was in earnest before I'll be none the less so now."

"You have a rival who will test your strength."

A wicked smile lighted up the young man's face at that.

"There are more ways than one of dealing with a rival," he said, with grim emphasis.

"Have a care how you say so," the father cautioned. "It would not do to have any one hear you. What if something should happen to him?"

"Never fear, dad. Our walls have no ears, we know that."

"When will you see Rittlers?"

"To-night."

"All right; give him the points he will need, but no more. You might say the thousand dollars is the main object in view, and promise him a quarter of it."

"I'll do that. Rittlers will be glad for the chance to get in a dig at this Broadway Billy."

"Why so?"

"For some game of his the young detective spoiled not many moons ago."

"Well, this may be his opportunity, but he must not do anything on his own account that will implicate us."

"Oh! he is shrewd enough not to do that. But, do you think there is any possible chance for that young detective to get hold of the secret you have just revealed to me?"

"There isn't the ghost of a chance."

"No one living knows it, eh?"

"Not a soul but you and me."

"What if Santvoord told somebody?"

"He didn't do that. If he had, there would have been no necessity for the iron box."

"That seems evident enough. Have you seen anything of the detective since he took hold of the case?"

"Not a thing. I guess he isn't working it very hot."

"Maybe he has given it up."

"Not likely, with a thousand dollars to bait him on. Oh, no, he'll try it, whether he makes a go of it or not."

"Suppose he comes to interview you?"

"I expect nothing else, and I hope he will."

"Why?"

"I want the chance to press upon him how eager I am for his success, and so forth, and to disarm him, as it were."

"There is nothing slow about you, dad. I find that I am only beginning to get acquainted with you. I thought I was a pretty tough nut, but—"

"There, now, my son, none of your insinuations. Remember that I am your father, and if you are a chip off the old block, so much the better for you, that is all of that."

"I can now account for some of my depravity of nature—"

"That will do, sir, I say. Because I have revealed a secret to you, that is not giving you any license. Holding secrets of yours, I considered it perfectly safe—"

"There, no need to mention any facts, dad."

"Our walls have no ears," laughing.

"No need to speak, all the same. There is an understanding between us, so let it rest at that."

"You see I knew well enough what I was doing, my boy. I was not afraid to tell you the story. We have something to work for, you will recognize."

"I should say so."

"Success means everything—fortune, happiness, and all that. Defeat means disgrace, beggary, death. You must see Rittlers and prepare for war, if it comes to that. At any

cost, that iron box must not see the light, but must fall into our hands as soon as it is discovered. We sleep on dynamite till that end is accomplished."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRUITLESS QUEST.

WHEN Broadway Billy was admitted into the Trotterman residence he made inquiry for Mr. Trotterman.

As shown, he had recognized Lucrece at once, though he had never seen her before to know her. At the time of the reading of the will she had worn a veil.

This home showed no evidences of wealth, and the fact that the young woman answered the bell showed that no up-stairs servants were employed. In truth there was but one servant—a woman for the rough work of the kitchen and laundry.

Mr. Trotterman was out, but was looked for at any moment, and the pretty young lady set about entertaining the caller pending her father's arrival.

"I suppose I may be excused for asking if you have discovered that wonderful iron box," the girl hinted, during a break.

"You thought, perhaps, I had come to invite your father to the opening of it," Billy remarked.

"Well, yes, that did occur to me."

"I cannot do so yet, however. The box has not been found, and is no nearer discovery than it was the other day."

"What a strange thing it is, isn't it?"

"Yes, rather."

"Papa and I have talked about it a good deal."

"And you have not been able to guess the secret it contains, of course?"

"No; and, woman like, that is what is troubling me."

Billy joined in the merry light laugh that followed the remark.

"Then your father has no idea what it may be, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest."

"Nor in what manner Mr. Santvoord ever wronged him?"

"No. In fact, papa is positive he never did wrong him in any way. He was always kindness itself to papa."

"Well, it is past finding out, yet. Mr. Santvoord certainly had some reason for giving your father the amount of wealth he did, something beyond mere friendship."

The girl looked at him wonderingly.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"It looks so, does it not?"

"But, you know they were such close friends. Mr. Santvoord said it was a friendship offering."

"And he forced your father to accept it."

"Yes; said if he did not he would sever all relations with him. Of course papa had no idea how near the poor man was to death then."

"How long was that before he died?"

"Only a month or so."

"The reason I look upon it as something more than mere friendship," Billy went on to explain, "is this: He gave Mr. Hodgerson no such gift, and I am told that he was even more strongly attached to him than to your father."

"I believe that is true, but, you know, Mr. Hodgerson is very wealthy, has more than Mr. Santvoord had himself, while papa was poor."

"That may explain away the point. But, is it not strange that he should have left bequests to both in so strange a manner!—mere papers concealed in a hidden iron box?"

"It is that which puzzles us so much."

"And then the strange injunction he placed upon his son."

Billy noticed that the young lady showed interest at this observation.

"What was that?" she required.

"Why, he forbid his seeking marriage until the iron box had been discovered and its secrets made known. This is strictly private, of course."

The color came and went in the girl's face, and Billy felt that he had made a good stroke in young Santvoord's interest. He believed this girl loved Palmer, and now she could understand him.

"How very strange!" she exclaimed.

"Almost as mysterious as the letter that was left for my enlightenment with respect to the hiding-place of the box."

"And that really beat everything, did it not? Papa has spoken of it a hundred times, and cannot possibly understand what it meant. Really, there is no meaning to it; do you think there is?"

"I believe there is meaning enough there, if

"I could only get at it," Billy declared. "It has cost me a sight of study, but I have been unable to solve it. You may be sure there is a clew in it, and when it comes out I suppose I shall blush to see how very simple it is."

There was something so very frank about this young lady that Billy felt as though he had known her all his life, and his talk was accordingly free and easy.

But, there was nothing to be learned from her, for she knew nothing to disclose, and it was a relief to the young detective when Mr. Trotterman arrived. At his coming the young lady withdrew.

"Well, what is the name?" Mr. Trotterman asked.

"Nothing in regard to the case," was Billy's response. "I have called to have a talk with you about it."

"Then you have not found the iron box?"

"No. I have not found the clew to it. That letter of Mr. Santvoord's is a conundrum."

"As I thought you would discover it to be, I have talked with Hodgerson about it, and we can make nothing out of it. I don't know what Elijah was thinking about when he put it in so mysterious a way."

"He was thinking about puzzling us all, I guess, and making me earn my money if I wanted the thousand dollars."

"But, why need he have been so very mysterious with his friends?"

"Owing to his secret, sir."

"And what of that? We have shared other secrets with him, Hodgerson and I."

"This was something greater, I am sure. Mr. Santvoord at some time or other did you an injury—"

"No, no. I will not believe that, sir."

"I think it proves itself. He gave you a large sum of money, which perhaps only canceled a debt he justly owed you. I cannot say as to that, but he had injured you somehow. I believe the opening of the iron box will disclose it."

"Why did he not disclose it in life? He could have been sure of my forgiveness."

"Perhaps you are not the only one he has wronged."

"My dear young man, I cannot bear to hear you talk thus of Elijah Santvoord! He was my friend for years, and has stood between me and disaster many a time. You do not know the man against whom you raise such suspicions. As soon would I distrust my friend Hodgerson."

"Well, well, let us say no more about that, then. Did Mr. Santvoord say anything to you about me before he died?"

"Not to me."

"Did he say anything you could not understand, or that you considered strange, or mysterious, at the time?"

"Well, no, I cannot say that he did. Hodgerson and I were together with him to the last, and what he said he said to both of us. There was nothing secret or mysterious."

"He had all confidence in you, of course."

"We were like brothers, he, Hodgerson and I."

"Then let me assure you of one thing, Mr. Trotterman."

"What is that?"

"That this secret—the iron box was one of which he could not speak to you and Hodgerson in life."

"You think so?"

"It stands for its own proof. Were it not so, he would have confessed it before he died. Perhaps he has wronged Hodgerson as well as you? But, that was not to be spoken of again."

"It distresses me to hear you speak of poor Elijah as having wronged me or any one else, sir."

"Let it rest. It was no secret to him that his son was paying some attentions to your daughter, I suppose."

"How came you to know this?"

"By observation and inquiry. You have admitted the correctness of it. Now, do you know of any reason why he should have desired this match not to be settled upon until the finding of the iron box?"

"Was that his wish?"

"It was."

"You astonish me, sir. No, I can see no reason. I thought we were both in favor of it. Certainly I was."

"Consider it, then, and you may be able to get some light upon the mystery after all. Do not speak about it to your daughter or to Palmer Santvoord, but let me know what you think about it when we meet next time."

"I understand, sir, I understand. And yet, I don't understand at all. Why should he desire

this delay till after the finding of the box? Is there some reason why my child is unworthy of—"

"Or Palmer Santvoord unworthy of her," supplemented Billy.

The man gave a start of surprise as that thought was forced upon him.

"Impossible!" he cried. "I say it is impossible. But, leave me, young man, and let me think it over alone. I will observe silence regarding it."

"Very well; I will see you again ere long, when we will talk further of the matter."

He took his leave, and made his next objective point the residence of Baptist Hodgerson.

That gentleman was at home, disengaged, and greeted Billy warmly and was eager in his inquiries as to what had been discovered.

"You will think I am eager," he remarked, "but who would not be? I am puzzled to guess what that paper can be that my poor friend left for me in so mysterious a manner."

"I believe, sir, it is a confession," responded Billy.

"A confession?"

"Yes! I am satisfied the man did a wrong to Trotterman, which he has tried to make right as far as possible, and it is not unlikely that he has something to confess to you as well. You must agree that it looks reasonable, at least."

"What! Elijah Santvoord wrong any one? You are mistaken, I am sure you are mistaken. I would have trusted him with my life, the same as I would trust Trotterman. No, no, there can be nothing of that sort. What it is I will not try to guess, but not that. Elijah Santvoord was honest to the last degree, my young friend."

Upon that point Hodgerson persisted, and Billy's interview with him was not unlike that which he had just had with Trotterman. When he took his leave, finally, he ought to have been impressed with Hodgerson's love for his dead friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY SEEKS ASSISTANCE.

WHEN Broadway Billy got back to his office he found restless Harry and Silent Seth eager to learn what progress he had made.

His face answered the question for them, however, as soon as he entered, and they knew he had met with poor success. He took his seat at his desk in his usual thoughtful way when puzzled.

"Didn't get there, did ye, boss?" Harry ventured to guess.

Silent Seth's manner voiced the same.

"No, I have not made much progress," Billy admitted. "If anything I'm more at sea than ever."

"Christopher Columbus! ye don't say so. Why, I was in hopes you would come back with somethin', sure. Didn't ye scare up a clew at all?"

"Oh! I got some points to begin work on, but that was all. There is the same puzzle about the letter. If I could only figure out the meaning of that to my satisfaction."

"Are ye sure it's got a meaning?"

"I'm more sure of it now than ever."

"Will ye tell us about it? I'm dyin' ter know, and Seth is so eager that he is speechless."

"Yes, I will tell you about it," answered Billy, "for it is a case upon which I desire you to keep yourselves posted, so if occasion requires you will be ready to take hold anywhere."

Accordingly, he gave his apprentices the particulars of his recent interviews.

"Now," when he had concluded, "what do you think about it? Seth, suppose you speak first. If you don't you won't get any chance against Harry."

"If you don't find it here, look there," was all the reticent boy had to offer in response.

Billy looked at him steadily, in an inquiring way.

"You still keep harping on that, Seth," he said. "Is it so constantly on your mind that you don't think of anything else?"

"That is enough to think of at once," was the rejoinder. "If I could only figure out what that means, I believe I'd have the key to the whole mystery. The clew is right there."

"Listen to the Philosopher!" remarked Harry. "He is right," declared Billy. "I believe, with him, the key to the whole thing is contained in those words, somehow."

"Then hadn't we better put our heads together and figger it out, or else shut up shop and go out of business? If there is a nut in the nut, why not crack the nut and have it out?"

"Very well; I agree to that," assented Billy.

"Suppose you do the cracking, my young Vidocq."

"I'm lookin' around for a handy job at blackenin' stoves," and Harry fubsided:—the nut, as he called it, was too hard for him to crack.

"You tell me you have been thinking of this letter, and almost nothing else, Seth?" Billy then asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, have you come to any conclusion at all?"

"When he says Here, I think he means right there on the very paper on which the letter is written."

"That is my impression, too. But, where is the mysterious There?"

"I give it up."

"Then there is something to work for yet, my silent shadower. If you can solve that part of it the rest will be easy."

"And I'm bettin' sugar to soap he can't do it," cried Harry. "He is a heavy thinker, is Seth, but I don't believe he carries ballast enough for this problem. It would stagger a giant. Selah!"

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Billy.

"What's that?"

"I'm going around and see the superintendent of police about it. If there is a man in New York can solve it, he's the man."

"Bully fer you!" ejaculated Harry. "I'll bet if there is any way of gettin' at it, he'll show ye the way. Wish I was up in his confidence like you are, boss. That was what you used to work for, though, when you was a kid like me and Seth."

Billy smiled at the ambition of his youthful days, and realized that his long dream had at last been fulfilled; so he set out for Headquarters to see his patron.

"Hello, Broadway Billy!" he was greeted. "Haven't seen you in some time now. Where have you been keeping yourself? Now you have got a knotty problem to wrestle with, and I know it. What is it?"

Billy had to smile to see how promptly his business had been divined by the keen-sighted superintendent.

"You have guessed it, sir," he admitted. "I have got hold of a case this time that is loaded too heavy for me, I guess."

"And you want some of my men to help you out with it?"

"No, not just that; I want you to unlock one point for me, or give me the key so I can do it myself."

"What is the point?"

"I'll have to give you the whole matter so you can look at it on every side at once. Have you got time to bother with it?"

"Plenty of time just now. Go ahead."

Billy gave him the case as it is known to the reader—that is, such as was known to him himself, and in conclusion asked:

"Now, solve the riddle for me! What is meant by—If you do not find it here, look there?"

"The first part is plain enough."

"The first part of the letter?"

"That, of course; but I referred now to the first part of that sentence."

"By here, then, he means—"

"The page where you are reading the words."

"So I have made up my mind, too. That being so, where is There?"

"The next page."

Billy looked at the iron-willed chief of detectives in a questioning manner. He had told him the next page was blank.

"But, there's nothing on the next page," he said.

"That is the place to look, nevertheless," was the firm rejoinder. "I have not seen the letter, but I have made up my mind to that."

"Shall I show it to you now?"

"Yes, now I will look at it."

Billy gave the letter into his hand, and he looked at it long and carefully.

Presently he took a magnifying glass from a drawer in his desk and held it over the blank sheet.

"Ha! my guess was right!" he exclaimed.

"What have you discovered?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"A pen has passed over this blank page, and there is invisible writing there, as sure as you live."

Billy looked through the glass, and sure enough there did seem to be indications that a pen had scratched the page as in writing.

"How did you guess it?" he asked.

"By careful deduction," was the response.

"From what you told me about Mr. Santvoord I set him down as a man of extreme care in delicate matters. Also, he was a keen judge of human nature. See the note he left with the colored girl addressed to you. He saw you already working on the case—"

"Hal you think, then, that girl can bring this writing out so it can be read? What a blind ninny I have been!"

"Don't condemn yourself, my boy! My years of experience count for much, you see. I have had to do with this sort of thing before. As to the girl, I am not sure she can do this, but a chemist can."

"But suppose he spoils the sheet, not knowing what it has been written with, as he might do in testing for it."

"There is something in that," admitted the great thief-catcher, thoughtfully. "Let me see that note you got from the colored girl."

Billy produced it.

The superintendent read it carefully and deliberately.

"Your idea may not be amiss," he said. "She may hold the key to it. He assures you that you may trust her, and says she may be of service to you. Then he adds: 'Follow directions of letter carefully for finding of the clew.'"

"And those directions are, 'If you do not find it here, look there.' Ha! I am to look to Rosa Polkadot!"

"You forget that we have already solved the meaning of that sentence, however. Not finding it on one page, we were directed to look to the next. There we discovered it all right."

"That's so, but I believe it has a double meaning. Funny I did not think of this before! He recommends the colored girl to me, and then says follow the directions of the letter carefully. The directions are, to look there. I believe this is the key to it, sure."

"Well, I hope so."

"And I owe it to you that I have got hold of it. I feel like kicking myself now."

"Don't mention it. You see, it was like this: The natural thing to do, after reading the first page, was to turn to the second. The direction was, if you don't find it here, look there. The caution on the outside shows the importance of the papers. Putting this and that together, there was the thing in a nutshell."

"I see it now, and it's so very plain that I feel as though I had better give up this business and take to peddling clams."

"You are inclined to depreciate the help I have given you, I see."

Billy flushed instantly.

"Don't think it," he cried. "But, I know you don't," seeing the superintendent smile. "No, far from it; I owe the whole case to you, I believe. But, I have robbed you of enough time, and I'll slide."

"One moment first, Billy. You have been cautioned to look out for danger, and I suppose you know where to look for it, eh?"

"I'm not sure that I do, but if I have a suspicion it is directed toward the Hodgersons."

"That's the quarter! Keep your eyes open there. Be wary of the wary, my boy, is the true detective's secret of action."

CHAPTER IX.

THE OTHER SIDE HEARD FROM.

THAT night Conrad Hodgerson entered a not very reputable resort and looked around as if in search of some one.

Whoever it was he wanted did not seem to be present, and a look of disappointment came over young Hodgerson's face. He sat down, however, and waited.

That he was no stranger there was evident, for everybody spoke to him, and after awhile he engaged in conversation with a seedy-looking individual whom he addressed as "Turnip."

"Have you seen Rittlers to-night, Turnip?" he asked.

"Yes," was the response, "he was down at Casey's awhile ago when I was there, talkin' with some of the boys."

"Do you know what he has got on hand for to-night?"

"Nothin', I guess."

"Do you think he'll be up here?"

"Most allus does strike here some time in the evenin'."

"I know he does, when he is not engaged. That was what I wanted to know of you."

"Well, I can't say for sure, of course, but don't think he had anything on hand. Anyhow, he didn't say nothin' to me about it if he had."

"I'll wait, anyhow."

"Got somethin' to put him onto?"

"Well, I wanted to see him on a little matter of business."

"I might go out and scout for him, if you want me to. Mebbly I can scare him up."

"All right, you can do that. Here's a quarter to keep you from getting dry while you are about it. If you find him, tell him I'm waiting."

The seedy fellow accepted the coin as though he did not frequently get hold of one, and went off.

He had been gone only a few minutes when another person entered the place, at sight of whom Hodgerson's face lighted up.

This new-comer was a thin, dark fellow, with keen eyes and a sharp nose, and altogether a pinched and hungry look about him. It was the ex-detective, Tim Rittlers.

Hodgerson knew the other fellow, Turnip, had not met him, or he would have returned with him in the hope of learning something.

"Hey, Tim!"

The new-comer looked around, and seeing Hodgerson, a smile lighted up his face and he went forward to where he was seated.

"How do?" he greeted. "What's the word?"

"Did you see Turnip?" asked Conrad.

"No."

"I thought not."

"Why, did you send him to find me?"

"Yes; but, it's just as well. I want to talk with you."

"All right, I'm ready for talk or anything else that comes along. What is on your mind?"

"How would you like to make two hundred and fifty dollars?"

"I'm in it, you bet!"

"Well, I can tell you how to do it."

"Much risk?"

"May be some."

"Well, let's have it. I'll tell you then whether I'll take it or not. No killing in it, is there? You know I draw the line at that. I take no chances for a seat in the death-chair, you know."

"Oh! pshaw! you don't suppose I would try anything of that sort, do you? I guess not. No; this is only a simple game, but it will require cool work, and I thought you would be just the man for it. You have got to hook horns with Broadway Billy if you undertake it."

"The devil?"

"No, not the devil; only the boy detective."

"I'd as lieve tackle the other fellow. What is it?"

"You think he is a terror then?"

"There is nothing like him in this city, for his years, and never was. I would not want him hot after me, that I tell you."

"Then I take it you would have some dread of going after him."

"Whew! Is that what you want?"

"It may come to that."

"Then I don't think I'm in it as much as I was. Two hundred and fifty don't begin to pay for a job like that. What do you want? Want him captured and laid by on the shelf for awhile?"

"Oh! I see you are getting at it backward. I'll tell you the thing as it is, and leave you to do no more guessing. Maybe you won't come in contact with him at all, but this case is one in which he has a hand, so you will have to be on the lookout."

"That's different. Go ahead with the story."

"Well, here is the whole thing in few words: There is an iron box containing one thousand dollars that has been hid away in some secret place. Broadway Billy is looking for it to get hold of the thousand. If you can get ahead of him I'll give you a quarter of the money. Will you try it?"

"Why, cert. There's nothing very criminal about that, is there?"

"Not if you are careful about it and don't get caught."

"Exactly. Who does this thousand belong to?"

"Broadway Billy."

"Whew! That isn't so pleasant again. But, if it's his, how is it he don't know where to put his hand on it?"

"Thereby hangs a tale. This iron box was left to him by will, and if he finds it the money is his. It is one of the strangest cases you ever heard of. I suppose you have heard of Elijah Santvoord?"

"Can't say that I ever did."

"Well, not to be wondered at, for he lived a retired life. He was a very eccentric old codger, and a very intimate friend of my governor's. When he died a short time ago he left the most peculiar will you could imagine. I am of the opinion he was stuck on the doings of this boy detective, and wanted to give him a puzzle to unravel."

"Yes?"

"Exactly. He left this iron box by will, with a thousand dollars in it, and if the boy found the box the money was to be his. And the clew he left to guide him was more of an enigma than anything else."

"Pshaw!"

"Yes, a regular riddle. It was a note, and all it said was this: 'If you do not find it here, look there.'"

"What are you giving me, anyhow?"

"I'm giving you facts. That is just as it stands. Now, I want you to set at work and find the box ahead of Broadway Billy."

"I just can't do it."

"Then you give up without trying?"

"You bet. That is no clew at all. A fellow can't do anything without a clew to work on."

"Well, here is the other way, then: You can play the spy upon Broadway Billy, and if he gets hold of it you can lay a plan to wrest it from him. That thousand is worth working for."

"I'm only gettin' a quarter of it, though."

"And you're only helping me, you see. I expect to do my share of the work."

"What else is there in that box besides the money?"

"You think there must be something else?"

"Might be."

"Well, if there is, Tim, we don't care anything about that; what we are after is the money. And I now you would like to knock Broadway Billy out once for luck."

"You are right in saying that!"

"This is your chance, then. Get the box away from him, and you can laugh at him."

"The little good that will do a fellow, when he won't dare to laugh out loud. Now if you would make it halves with me it would be more encouragin'."

"Confound you! why don't you ask it all! Here I come to you to put two hundred and fifty dollars in your hands, and you immediately try to grasp more. You only need bristles and a pen, Tim."

"That's all right, but make it five hundred and I'll go in with you. I will have the most work and all the danger on my side anyhow."

"Well, there's no use standing over it, since it's nothing out of pocket. I will give half of it. There is something else that must be understood before we clinch the bargain, though."

"What's that?"

"When you get this iron box you are to bring it to our house, and it is to be opened there in the presence of you, my father and myself. See?"

"Some."

"And further; everything in the box besides the five hundred dollars which you are to have, belongs to father and me."

"I thought there was more than the money at stake."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean there is something in that box you want to get hold of worse than the money."

"Well, I see there is no use trying to blind you, Jim. I'll make a clean breast of it, so you will know just what's up."

"That's the best way to deal with me."

"There are some papers in the box which old Santvoord left for the governor and his friend Trotterman—you don't know him, but it makes no difference anyhow; and the governor wants to get first whack at them. Now, there you have it."

"That's straight, eh?"

"That's all of it. You see, it's not of much importance, and if it wasn't for the money I wouldn't bother my head with it. We certainly wouldn't pay a cent out of pocket on it. Now, what do you think about it? Can't you go in and outdo Broadway Billy?"

"I'll have to have more of a clew than I've got."

"Don't see how you'll get it."

"I'll play roots on the noble William, I think, and work him all I can, and maybe if he has got a clew I can get it away from him. Then there's those two young imps of his, they are as much to be feared as Billy himself, almost, the way he has got them trained. If I see any good chance ahead I must lay a snare to put them out of the game till it is wound up. We'll have that box, Con, if possible."

CHAPTER X.

LIGHT AHEAD NOW.

ON the following morning Broadway Billy paid a visit to a chemist of considerable note.

He was a stranger to this man, but as soon as he had made himself known he was welcomed and the chemist inquired his business.

"I have come to ask you if there is such a thing as invisible ink," Billy made known.

"Yes, there are several things which answer to that name," was the reply.

"Well, if I handed you a paper supposed to be written upon with such an ink, could you test it without danger of ruining the paper? That is, with no knowledge of what kind of ink had been used."

"Not if it happened that I had to test for all before I struck the right one, sir."

"That is what I was afraid of."

"Have you some writing of that sort?"

"I have reason to think so, sir."

"Let me see it."

"On condition that you promise to run no risk of spoiling it."

"That is understood."

With that understanding Billy took the letter from his pocket and allowed the chemist to look at it.

At sight of the signature the letter bore the man of science gave a start.

"Why," he cried, "I knew Elijah Santvoord!"

"You knew him? Well, he is dead, as perhaps you have seen by the papers."

"Yes, I saw the notice of his death. He was a chemist; or, at any rate, he read in the same class with me at school."

"Hal this is coming at it," cried Billy.

"Perhaps you can guess what he has used to write invisibly upon this sheet."

"It would only be guessing. I may be able to give you a hint toward finding the secret of it, however, and if you find it you can come here and I will apply the test."

"Well, I'll do that."

"It is years since Santvoord and I read together. He has never practiced the science. It would naturally slip away from him. To perform any experiments he would have to read up. He may have books in his library. You might find a mark at the very page—"

"Say no more," Billy interrupted. "I catch what you mean, and it is a good pointer for me."

"Then there is something else," the chemist went on. "He would have to purchase the materials to experiment with. You may be able to find where he bought them, and what they were. Then we shall have the matter in our own hands. Get that information and come to me again, and I'll bring the writing out so you can read it—provided there is any writing here."

"You doubt that, then?"

"Most of these so-called sympathetic inks leave a faint trace of color here and there. Here is none."

"The microscope, however, reveals the tracings of a fine pen."

"That seems to settle it, then. Two and two make four. The acid and the base brought together make the salt. The proof seems sufficient."

After some further talk with the chemist, Billy took his leave and bent his steps in the direction of the Santvoord residence.

Rosa Polkadot answered the door as usual.

"I have called to see you, this time, Rosa," Billy announced.

The girl showed no surprise, but stepped back to admit him.

"All right, sir," she said, as she closed the door. "Come right this way, and we'll go to the sittin'-room."

She conducted him to a little room at the rear of the parlor, and set out a chair for him, saying further:

"Poor Mr. Santvoord said I was to help you in work you had to do, sir, and I'm ready to help."

"Why didn't you say something about it before?"

"I done jest what I was told, sir."

"Then you were told not to offer any information till it was sought?"

"That was the way of it, sir."

"When did your dead master give you the note which you slipped into my hand yesterday?"

"Some days 'fore he died, sir."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said a young man would be given work to do in finding a box that he had hid away, and told me to help all I could."

"Did he say how you were to help me?"

"Yes; he said any way you asked me."

"Well, I have come here to find the iron box that was mentioned in the will. Can you help me at that?"

"Do you know where to look for it?"

"No; do you?"

"No, sir."

"Then your help can't be of much use to me there. Now, did your master say anything to you about another letter he had left for me?"

"That is the question I was waitin' for you to ask me, sir."

"You were waiting for me to ask you that? Why so? You must have heard something about the letter, then?"

"Wait, and I'll show you now what Mr. Santvoord said I was to show you when you asked me that."

The girl spoke with very little of the usual dialect.

Rising, she stepped to a desk and brought forth from it a sheet of paper, handing it to Billy.

"Look at that," she requested.

"I see it," the young detective answered.

"Only a blank half sheet of writing paper."

"That's what it is. But, now you watch it and I'll s'prise you like Mr. Santvoord s'prised me."

She had now taken from the desk a small vapor spray, consisting of a bottle with some kind of liquid in it, a rubber bulb, tubes, and so forth.

"Hold up the paper," she directed.

Billy did so.

"And now keep your eye on it and see what you'll see."

She used the spray, sending a little cloud of vapor upon the page, and in a moment dark outlines began to appear.

These grew thicker and darker, and presently a sentence in bold, black words appeared in view, the letters large and easily to be read.

It was this:

"If you do not find it here, look there."

Broadway Billy could only sit and stare at the page for a few moments, his mind filled with wonder at the change that had been wrought under his very eyes. The clew was now within his reach!

"What do you think of that?" the girl asked.

"That was pretty well done," confessed Billy.

"What more did your master say you should do?"

"He said I was to give this bottle to you, just as it is, and you would know what to do with it."

"And he was right," Billy cried, taking the coveted bottle eagerly. "I do know what to do with it. Was there anything more he told you, Rosa?"

"Yes, there was something more, but I am not at liberty to tell you that until you ask about it, same as you asked about the letter. Mr. Santvoord knew what he was about, sir."

"I begin to believe he did, true enough."

Billy had now profound respect for the dead man. Where he had at first looked upon his bequest as some vagary of a disordered brain, he now comprehended that it was the outcome of deep thinking and reasonable caution.

There had been a good excuse for all this secrecy concerning the iron box. The secret it contained must be a great one, indeed. It had been kept from son, friend, and everybody. The one who had been most trusted was this humble colored servant, and she apparently knew little about the box itself.

When Broadway Billy considered that he had been selected as the one of all others to bring the box to light and reveal its mystery, he felt pardonably elated. It was an honor conferred upon him.

"I want to ask some questions, Rosa," he said.

"All right, sir, I was told to answer 'em all," was the response.

"How was it your master selected you to be the one to help me most in this work?"

"'Cause he knew he could trust me, sir."

"Couldn't he trust his son? or Mr. Hodgerson? or Mr. Trotterman?"

"I s'pose he could, but he didn't. He didn't tell nobody but me anything, far as I know."

"And what did he tell you?"

"You know all about that, sir, far as you have gone. When you ask more you will get more. But, I am to tell nobody else, so it won't be no use for you to send some other pusson."

Another wise precaution on the part of the dead man, as Billy saw at once.

"Don't imagine that I'll send any one else," he declared. "Did your master say anything about what I was to do with this bottle, Rosa?"

"I told you he said you would know what to do with it."

"Did he say when I was to use it? or where?"

"No, sir."

"Then that is all left to my own judgment. I

think I will go and see Mr. Hodgerson, seeing that he was your master's nearest friend, and consult with him."

Billy saw the girl's eyes dilate at this and knew he had alarmed her.

He had said this only as a test. He had suspicions against Hodgerson, and he wanted to see if this girl had been warned against him. If such was the case, then it would confirm his suspicion.

"Don't you do it sir!" she said in a whisper. "'Cause why, I was told p'tic'lar not to let him know a thing, and not to let him get anything out of me. I say don't you do it, sir!"

The suspicion was confirmed. Hodgerson's friendship for the dead man was only a sham! He had reason to fear the exposure of the contents of the iron box. It was from him that danger was to be looked for. The warning had not been idle, as Billy fully realized now.

CHAPTER XL

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

THE colored girl was silent after that, and it was some moments before Billy spoke to her.

Presently he said:

"Your master has great confidence in you."

"Because he knew he could trust Rose Polkadot, sir!"

"And why was it he could trust you so fully? Come, you have been told to answer my questions."

"Because I loved him, and I would have laid down my life for him if he had asked it. He was good to me after mammy died here. She was his housekeeper for years an' years."

There were tears in the girl's eyes as she said this.

Billy understood how it was.

"Do you know what was in the note you put into my hand in the hall yesterday, Rosa?" he asked now.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you know it said I was to trust you. That being the case, I want you to trust me, since you know your dead master trusted me. Now, what do you know about Mr. Hodgerson?"

The girl shuddered.

"I know he is a bad man," she declared—"a very bad man!"

"Then how was it he and your master were such good friends?"

"They weren't friends at all, sir."

"Not friends?"

"No, sir."

"But, in his will your master spoke of him as his dear friend, and Hodgerson speaks very feelingly of him."

"Can't help that, sir. My master hated him as he hated a snake, and many a time I have seen him shake his fist at the door after he had been here and gone away again."

Billy was reaping fast now.

"That's strange. What was the trouble between them?"

"Hodgerson had some power over my poor master, something he could not get away from."

"That is the way it certainly looks. You don't know what it was, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"Does any one else know it?"

"No, sir."

"Nor the facts you have told me?"

"No, sir; not even Mr. Palmer, sir. And master forbade my mentioning it to a soul."

"How was it with Trotterman?"

"It was different with him, sir. I have seen Mr. Santvoord weep after he had been here alone. But, he wasn't often here alone, for Hodgerson was 'most always around somewhere."

"Then the mystery of this thing seems to be working itself out, Rosa. I can see my way partly clear, now."

"The iron box will make it clear, I believe."

"I know it will, and the iron box is now within reach. Did I understand you to say Palmer Santvoord is not at home?"

"He isn't home, sir."

"Then I will take my leave for the present. I shall undoubtedly drop in to see you again before long, Rosa, when you will have a chance to tell me the rest you know about this matter, and which you are now holding back."

"I'll be here every hour, sir, and ready to help you all I can, the same as Mr. Santvoord said."

"Is it possible, Rosa, that you know where this iron box is?"

"No, I do not know where it is, sir?"

"Then no one knows."

"Mr. Santvoord said no one on earth had any means of finding it but you, and he believed you could do it, with my help."

"And I am of the opinion that I could never do it without your help, Rosa, that's the fact."

When Billy took his leave he went straight to his office.

There he found Harry and Seth both wearing pretty long faces, as though something had not gone to their liking.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "what's the matter here?"

"Do we look sort of more-dead-than-alive?" asked Harry.

"You don't look as bright as I have seen you looking many a time."

"Well, it's cause we're gettin' stale and rusty settin' here doin' nothin', that's what's the matter, boss."

"Ha, ha! Is that all? Well, now, just 'liven up, for I have got hold of the handle of the case at last, and here's something that will interest you."

Harry's face brightened at once. Seth's had been no longer, perhaps, than on the day before, so it was slower to alter its expression. Both were interested, nevertheless, and crowded near.

"Here is a piece of paper," Billy said, taking from his pocket the note he had just seen Rosa Polkadot bring out the writing upon, "which, when I saw it first, was perfectly white, and while I looked at it this writing appeared."

As he spoke the last words he turned the half sheet so they might see, and there was the sentence:

"If you do not find it here, look there."

"Chestnuts!" sneered Harry, with contempt.

Silent Seth uttered something that sounded like a stifled groan.

"Yes, the same old gag," said Billy, laughing, "but I tell you there was a power of meaning in that, my lads."

He told them, then, about his visit to Headquarters, about the finding out the meaning of the mysterious letter, and all that had taken place since, and by the time he had done the boys were in high spirits.

"What do you say to that, Seth?" Billy demanded, as he wound up with his story.

"Immense!" was the ejaculation. "That is what I was trying so hard to get at, and now a heavy load has been lifted off my mind."

Happy Harry, at that, sprung for a newspaper and began to fan Seth with it with all his might.

"Christopher Columbia!" he cried. "You enter know better, Seth, than to say so much all in one breath. Don't you know you are likely to get out o' wind and never smile again?"

Seth smiled, and having had his say, was silent.

"But, crackers an' cheese!" cried Harry, tossing away the paper and facing to the front again.

"Let's see the rest of this thing, boss. If you don't want to see me turn toes up right here, get out that mysterious letter and 'ply the squirter to it the same as the gal did."

"Yes, that is the next thing on the program," Billy declared. "Just lock the door there, so we won't be interrupted, and we'll see what can be made out of it by the same means."

Harry had the door secured in a moment, and was back again.

Drawing the mysterious letter from his pocket, and asking Seth to hold it, Billy proceeded to use the vaporizer upon the apparently blank page—his Beagles watching intently.

There was no result at first, but presently black dots and lines began to appear, gradually spreading, till finally the whole was made plain.

There was what was clearly the plan of a room, and under that some figures and writing.

The writing read:

"TO WILLIAM WESTON:—

"You have done well. It now remains only to follow these directions to recover the hidden box. Consult with Rosa Polkadot, if in doubt, and she can aid you greatly. She knows not where, but with the aid of this plan, you can find. Obey my injunctions to the letter. Beware of danger!

"Yours in the other world,
"ELIJAH SANTVOORD."

"Christopher Columbia!" cried Happy Harry, jumping up and cracking his heels together. "This is the best thing out of jail! It beats anything we have done yet, boss! Whoop! Now I'm wide awake, you bet, and ready for anything that comes up. Say, hold me, or I'll shed my skin! The jeebeeb is howling!"

"I would say put that letter in a place by itself, now," observed Seth the Silent.

It was seldom he offered advice like this without being asked direct, and Billy looked at him.

"That is good advice, Seth," he said, "but you have some special reason for offering it, I'm sure. What is it?"

"Well, if there is danger, and they find out by any chance you have made out the secret, they'll want it, and so I'd say to put it—"

At that moment a woman's screams were heard in the hall just outside the door, there was the sound of heavy feet in rapid flight down the stairs, and with a bound Broadway Billy was at the door.

He had dropped the papers upon the desk, and Harry and Seth were with him as he opened the door and sprung out.

Seth had been cut short in what he was going to say.

A woman was in the hall, wringing her hands, and men and women were pouring out of every office on that floor.

Already there was a crowd, and it was some moments before the woman could calm herself sufficiently to tell what had happened. In the meantime the man who had been heard to make such a hasty retreat down the steps had disappeared.

In fact, only one or two had caught a glimpse of him.

"Tell us, madam, what it is," Broadway Billy urged.

"I have been robbed!" the woman gasped. "A horrid man took my pocketbook and ran with it."

"What kind of man was he?" Billy asked. "Tell me, quick, and I'll see what can be done toward recovering it."

"He was a big man, sir, with awful red hair and whiskers, and he had only one eye—"

"After him! Harry—Seth!" Billy cried.

"You can't mistake such a man in a thousand! Hand him over to the first policeman, and have him brought back here. You may come in, madam, and wait. This is my office, and I am a detective."

CHAPTER XII.

THE OTHER SIDE MOVES.

THIS woman had the appearance of a patient, long-suffering little body, and those around were full of sympathy for her, and denounced freely the wretch who had robbed her.

She thanked Broadway Billy for his kindness, but said she must first go and bring her friend, who was waiting for her at the corner. Then she would come back and wait to see if the rascal could be found and made to restore her money.

She went at once, descending the steps in a sorrowful way, while the crowd expressed their sympathy.

In a moment she was at the bottom, and had disappeared from sight.

Some minutes passed, and she did not return.

The crowd in the hall began to disperse, and like others, Broadway Billy entered his office again.

As he did so the thought of the papers he had dropped on his desk upon hearing the woman's screams came to him, and he stepped forward to take them up.

To his amazement they were gone!

He tried to look everywhere at once, as a person will under such circumstances, wondering what had become of them.

He looked on the desk, on the floor, behind the desk, in the drawers, and finally searched his pockets for them, thinking perhaps he had been mistaken about having laid them on the desk.

They were not to be found!

"No, they are gone," he declared. "I am not such a gilly as not to know what I did with them. I know I dropped them right here, for I did not want to waste a second in getting out. I thought as I dropped them they were all right, and I'd fold them up when I came back."

He scratched his head in a puzzled way.

"It can't be that some one dodged in here and took them during the few moments we were out," he reflected. "No one would have dared to undertake it, unless— But, it's folly to think it was all a put-up job. No; the only way I can explain it is that Harry or Seth picked them up and stuck them out of sight on the spur of the moment. Seth spoke about taking good care of them only a moment before. They'll soon be back."

That conclusion arrived at, there was nothing to do but wait.

When five minutes had passed, however, and the woman had not made her appearance, Billy grew more uneasy.

Grabbing up his hat he hastened out of the office, this time closing the door after him, and went down to the street.

There he looked all around, first for some sight of the woman and next for Harry and Seth. Neither was anywhere to be seen.

"This beats the dickens," he said to himself. "It begins to look as though there was something crooked about the whole matter. But, that seems impossible. Who could have planned and carried out such a game?"

He walked to the nearest corner, looking for Harry and Seth, but the two apprentices were nowhere around.

"Well, one or the other of them must be back shortly," he mused. "They have taken different directions on coming out, and harm can't come to both of them from the same quarter. But, pshaw! my suspicions get the better of my judgment. To think this a plot is to give the other side credit for more brains than I thought there was in the whole combination."

When twenty minutes had elapsed, however, and there was still no sign of the woman, then he was ready to believe anything.

She had gone out with the express intention of coming back as soon as she got her friend, and here she had not appeared at all. There was something mysterious about it.

And, then, what could be keeping Harry and Seth so long?

If they had not discovered the red-headed man with the missing eye at once, it was folly for them to expect to find him.

A thousand men might scour the neighborhood and not get a sight of him, once he had become lost in the Broadway crowd. There were a thousand ways for him to elude pursuit.

Broadway Billy was nettled.

"Plague on the luck!" he muttered, as he returned to the office. "If this was a plot it was a masterpiece. I can't believe it. And if it was a plot—Sweet pertaters! I think I had better get up and hustle some if I don't want to get left, that's all. One thing is sure, the papers are gone, and without them I am a lame horse in the race. It is certain, now, they are not here in the office, and I can't think Harry or Seth would venture to put them in his pocket."

He had returned to the office and made a thorough search for them, but they were positively gone.

With quick resolve he made haste to go back to the Santvoord residence.

Meanwhile what of Harry and Seth?

When they dashed down the stairs in quest of the thief, they meant business, and it would have fared ill with a red-headed man with a missing eye if they had seen such.

At the street door they parted, one going in one direction and one in the other, each keeping a sharp lookout for a man answering to the description given.

No such person was to be seen.

The adventures of the two boys were quite similar, so we will follow Silent Seth.

He had not gone a great distance up the street, watching keenly both sides of the way, when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder and he felt the cold pressure of a club against the back of his neck.

He turned his head quickly, to find himself in the grasp of a policeman.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You know what's the matter," was the response. "Not a word out of ye, or I'll crack your cocoanut with my club."

"But, I haven't done anything," Seth declared, angrily. "My name is Seth Martin, and I belong to the office of Broadway Billy, the—"

"Shut your head right up!" was the stern command. "Ye needn't tell me anything of that sort. I know what I'm about. Not a word, now, or I'll make ye sick."

They had reached a corner, and the policeman yanked Seth around and down a side street with no gentle hand.

Everybody was looking on, of course, but Seth knew enough about policemen and their clubs to obey the orders he had received, so held his peace.

He knew the worst that could befall him was to be locked up for a few hours on whatever charge the officer had to make against him. Broadway Billy would see to it that he was released.

At the next corner another turn was made, and about half-way down the block a closed carriage was found waiting.

The officer stopped at this, and Seth was hustled into it before he could offer resistance.

At this proceeding he knew something was wrong.

Policemen were not in the habit, he knew, of taking their prisoners to the station in carriages.

If he had any lingering doubt as he was being forced into the vehicle by the officer, it was dispelled immediately when two men within laid hold upon him.

The policeman waited near, explaining the

matter in some way to the inquiring throng which had quickly collected.

Seth, by this time, had guessed that he was no officer at all, but only some rascal so disguised, and he would have given the alarm, but those who held him had already gagged him.

It was about the coolest bit of work that had ever been done in broad daylight.

The carriage waited a few minutes, and presently another policeman hove into sight from the opposite direction with another prisoner, a boy like the first.

This was Happy Harry, but he was not looking very happy just then. He showed evidences of having made a struggle, and there was a red imprint on his face that bespoke a blow from the pretending policeman's hand.

"Here's the other whelp," the officer cried, on coming up. "Into the carriage with him before I break his head for him. He kicked me, and I'd as lief mash his head as not. Shut up! not a word out of ye or I'll paste you one that you'll remember a good while."

Harry had not kicked him at all, but his tongue had been likely to get the fellow into trouble and he had struck Harry over the mouth with his hand.

Harry made another effort to let the bystanders know the truth, but both the officers laid hold upon him and he was forced into the vehicle in a twinkling, one of the rascals having clapped his hand over his mouth in doing so.

At once the door closed and the carriage rattled off.

"Two of the worst wretches of their age we ever tackled," remarked one of the pseudo-policemen, then, to the crowd. "They are safe for a year at least."

And with that he and his companion walked off, swinging their clubs in the style of the "finest" and acting generally as though they owned the city and its people together.

The crowd looked after them, some comments were made, and that was all.

What is everybody's business is nobody's business, and while some in the crowd thought strange of the proceedings, no one questioned it.

In a few moments the crowd had melted away, and that was the last of it so far as they were concerned.

But it was not the last of it with Harry and Seth, by any means.

The two villains into whose hands they had fallen were not by any means gentle with them, and both were gagged and bound effectually.

And not only that, but while the carriage rolled along they were wrapped in separate covers and bound with straps in such a way that they looked like anything but two lively boys.

Provision had been made against their smothering, but otherwise they were about as useful as dead boys, so far as helping themselves was concerned.

When at last the vehicle came to a stop it was before a vacant store, and the two "bundles" were taken out and carried inside, one upon the shoulder of each man, and the carriage went off immediately.

Once in the store, the door was locked.

The windows had been whitened, and a cloth sign tacked over them prevented any one from looking in.

Here the young ferrets were speedily unbound and helped out of the wrappings that had been put on them, and were taken to a room at the rear.

The gags were taken from their mouths here, and their feet set free, but they were left with their hands securely tied behind their backs and the door was locked upon them. They were in almost darkness, and in a particularly bad plight.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OFFER FLATLY REFUSED.

Nor long after Broadway Billy took his leave from the Santvoord residence, before the events last recorded, an elderly woman rung the bell at the house of the Hodgersons.

The door opened, she was admitted without question, and she asked at once for Mr. Hodgerson.

She was shown to the library, where that gentleman was smoking.

"Hal you?" he cried at sight of her.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what is it?"

"He has been there, and I listened."

"That was right. Well, what did you overhear? I'll pay you well, as I promised."

"He talked a good while with Rosa, and she showed him a letter. She took a bottle and

squirted something on the paper, and the writing appeared."

"Thunder and lightning! You don't tell me so!"

"That's what she done, the sly hussy. And then she gave the bottle to him, telling him Mr. Santvoord had told her to do it."

"And he took it away with him?"

"Yes."

"But, what did they talk about?"

"I couldn't hear very much of it, for they talked so low."

"Tell me the little you did hear, then."

"Well, he told Rosa she was a smart girl, or somethin' like that, and said he would come and see her again. And then she said she would be there all the time and would tell him everything she could."

"She will, eh? We'll see about that."

"But, I'd like to know what it all means, anyhow, Mr. Hodgerson."

"It is not for you to know. You are to be paid well for the part you play in it, and that is all that need concern you."

"Well, what else shall I do, sir?"

"Just the same as you are doing now. Hear and see everything you can, and let me know at once. Here is five dollars for this information."

"Five dollars!"

"Yes; and I'll pay you as liberally every time, too. Mind, however, that you are careful not to let any one suspect you are coming here."

The woman pocketed the money.

"I'll be all eyes and ears, now," she declared, "and there won't a mouse stir in that house but I'll see him."

She went away, then, and Hodgerson fell to pacing the floor.

"So, that's what it was, eh?" he said to himself. "Secret writing, eh? It is a wonder I could not think of that before. But, now that we know the secret of it the rest will be easy. I wish Conrad would come."

He had his wish, for just then the door opened and his worthy son stepped into the room.

There was a smile on his face.

"Hello, dad, what's up?" he asked.

"There's a good deal up, Conrad. I have got the secret of that wonderful letter at last."

"The secret of it? What do you mean?"

"Why, that blank page was written with invisible ink."

"The deuce! Why didn't we think of that? But, how did you find this out, I'd like to know?"

"By the housekeeper, whom I have bribed liberally. Here's the simple facts of the case; see what you'll make of them."

With that he made known the part Rosa Polkadot was playing.

"Hal! good!" cried his son. "We will make use of that dusky maiden, and now the whole thing is in our hands. The papers will be in our possession before another hour passes, if all works well."

"So soon? What plan have you laid?"

"Oh, Rittlers has bent his mind to it. He is playing for big game, that fellow is."

"How do you mean?"

"He will bear watching. He suspects there is more in that box than I have told him, and I can see that he is bound to have it at any cost. But, when he gets it, he'll get me at the same time."

"You don't think he would play us false?"

"Not Tim; but, he would make us come up high if he had a good chance to do that."

"That wouldn't be so bad, but he must not be allowed the chance. You must keep a tight rein on him, Conrad, and see that he does not take the bit in his teeth and run away."

"I'm going to see to that part of it."

"Well, what were you going to tell me?"

"Why, he has made a bold stroke so as to be on top of the heap at the first. He is going to weaken that young detective by depriving him of the aid of his boys, and if he can, get hold of the paper at the same time."

"That is a bold stroke. Can he carry it out?"

"He knows it's a bold one, but he has made big preparation for it, and it is a long chance for its miscarrying."

Thereupon the young man made known the scheme, which can be understood by the reader, since the working of it has already been revealed.

"I can't say that I like that altogether," the old gentleman remarked.

"Why not, dad?"

"It shows that Tim expects to make a bigger stake than his promised share of the thousand dollars. He has already spent a hundred if a cent."

"Yes; but he is as eager to give Broadway

Billy a backhander as he is to earn the reward, you see. He planned it all, and meant to carry the game by storm. He has probably given Broadway Billy enough to occupy his thoughts for a time."

"I hope he will get the papers, anyhow. Now that we know the secret of the queer letter, we'll soon solve the rest of it."

"Yes, we'll soon have the whole thing now. But, I must go and meet Tim and work with him."

"And don't leave him and give him a chance to cheat us."

"Trust me."

The son went off as abruptly as he had come, and the father continued pacing the floor.

His brow grew clouded, and yet more so as time went by. This matter was not working altogether to his liking.

"It was a mistake taking Tim Rittlers into it, after all," he said to himself. "Here are half a dozen or more of outsiders preying upon it now, and no knowing where the end will be. Of course, it isn't likely the others know any more than just the work they have been hired to do, but there's a risk to run."

No, he was not pleased, and he showed it. Nor was he easy in mind at the prospect in view.

When Conrad left the house he did not go at once to meet the rascal detective, as he had declared his intention of doing, but went to the house of Abiel Trotterman.

It was Lucrece who opened the door.

She asked him in, but there was little in her face to show that he was a welcome guest.

"Do you want to see papa?" she asked.

"You know I do not," was the response. "I have come to see you yourself. I have come for my answer."

"If that is the case, Mr. Hodgerson, you force me to make use of the very plainest language I know how to use, for I mean to have you understand me once and for all."

"Then you—"

"I will not marry you, sir, now or ever. It will be only folly for you ever to mention it again."

The young rascal's face had darkened, and now he seized the girl's wrist.

"Listen," he hissed: "You shall marry me, Lucrece Trotterman, for I have taken oath to it. I am determined to have you. The sooner you make up your mind to it the better for all concerned."

"Release me, sir!" the girl cried. "You have had your answer; now, go. You are less of a gentleman than I thought, and my estimate never was high."

"Oh! you can say cutting things, my pretty miss, but I'll tame you one of these days."

As if afraid to trust his temper, the young rascal turned suddenly and took himself off and away.

"I shall tell papa the moment he returns," the girl said to herself, as, trembling with indignation she closed the door.

She had not had time to recover when there was another ring at the bell, and this time it proved to be Palmer Santvoord.

"Why, Lucrece," he greeted, "what is the matter? Have you seen a ghost?"

Some thoughts had passed rapidly in the girl's mind while her lover was thus speaking, and she resolved to set his mind at rest.

She remembered the secret Broadway Billy had let out to her, concerning the promise Eljah Santvoord had exacted of his son, and she decided to let her lover know his cause was safe.

"I have not seen a ghost," she made answer, "but I have had a very unpleasant interview, Palmer."

"With whom?" with rising indignation.

"Conrad Hodgerson."

Palmer Santvoord's face flushed at once, and to relieve him of his embarrassment the young woman quickly resumed:

"He has been almost trying to force me to say yes to his suit for my hand in marriage, and to-day I gave him a decided No. Then he began to threaten, and— But, I will say no more."

"The coward!" cried Palmer. "He threatened you—"

"There, there, do not mind it," the girl urged. "He has had his answer for once and all, as I told him, so let it rest."

At that she changed the subject abruptly, and went chatting away about something else, and Palmer could only follow her.

Since his own lips were sealed, it was better so.

When he left the house, some time later, he carried with him the clear impression that his forced silence would work no ill to his cause.

In fact, there was a mutual understanding between the lovers, brought about by the young lady, since she knew how Palmer was placed, and that, too, though no word had passed between them concerning it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEAGLES BREAK OUT.

As stated, Broadway Billy made haste to get back to the Santvoord residence to confer again with Rosa Polkadot.

She opened the door to him, and he saw at once that something troubled her. Her face showed it. Her manner was very serious, and she looked around with caution as he came in.

"What is it, Rosa?" he asked.

"There is a spy in this house, sir," she answered.

"A spy?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"The housekeeper. She went out after you were here before, and after she came back she said enough to let me know what she had been up to."

"Where had she been?"

"To Hodgerson's, I suspect. But, don't let us talk here. Come into the library, for Mr. Palmer is out yet. If we talk low she can't hear a word there, and I know she can't see."

The girl led the way.

"I s'pose you have come back for the rest of the paper?" she said, in a matter-of-fact way.

Billy was quick to catch his cue.

It might not do to let the girl know he had lost the papers.

"Yes," he answered. "I suppose you have something more for me, and I'm here to get it."

"Here it is, then."

She took from her bosom a folded paper, which she gave into Billy's hand.

Billy opened it and saw a drawn plan, almost the same, as he thought, as that of the now missing letter, as he remembered that one.

And across the face of it, where two lines ran, were the words:

"If you do not find it here, look there."

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Still more mystery about it, Rosa?"

"No, no more mystery this time, sir. I am to tell you the secret, now. You are to take this paper, place it over the one you have, and look through them at the light, then all would be made plain."

Billy groaned in spirit.

"And is this all you know, Rosa?" he asked.

"That is all. But, I am to show you down to the cellar at any time you are ready to go."

Hal! that was what Billy had been after!

Now he knew positively where to look for the missing, or hidden, box, and it should soon be unearthed.

As he examined the paper he had in hand, however, he could see that it was not in itself complete, and now, too, as he recollected the other drawing by this, that had been the same.

"We will not go to the cellar now, Rosa," he said in a low tone. "If there is a spy in the house she positively must not have a hint that the box is in the cellar, or she will tell the Hodgersons. I will put that off till another time. This is all for the present."

"I'll keep a still tongue, sir. If Mr. Santvoord could trust me, you need not be afraid to do so."

"I do trust you, Rosa."

"And even if they did suspect the cellar they would not find it, for they have searched there half a dozen times. Master told me to let them search all they had a mind to."

"Then it must be securely hidden indeed, and nothing but these papers will ever bring it to light."

"Nothing. If you lose the papers you never can find it."

Billy took his leave, studying the case as he went his way. It was plain that Santvoord had mistrusted everybody. His putting this map upon two separate sheets was proof of it. No one could find it by the aid of one paper alone; he must have them both.

In the mean time what of Happy Harry and Silent Seth.

Seth's name fitted him well under almost any circumstances, but Harry's was a misnomer now, certainly. He was anything but happy.

When left alone, and when the last sound of the retreating rascals had died away, Harry said:

"Well, Seth, we're in a pickle, sure."

The fact did not need any support from Seth, so he was silent.

"We have been and gone and run into a consarned diffikilty," Harry declared. "And the most important thing I know of is to find some way of getting out of it. Now, Stoick, buckle your mind to it and let's hear from you."

Silent Seth had taken a seat upon an empty box, and with his eyes fixed upon a certain spot on the wall he knit his brows and began to study hard, in spite of Harry's incessant talking.

"Those fellows wasn't policemen at all," Harry stormed. "I knew that before, and I know it all the better now. What was their game, Seth? What are we in limbo for? Christopher Columbia! what will the boss say? Seth, we must get out of here if we have to reduce ourselves to the size of mice and creep out. This move means business, and Broadway Billy needs us now if he ever did."

Seth was still silent.

Harry stormed at him, and fretted and fumed around like a caged kingbird, all the time speculating upon their fate and the chances for their escape.

"Why in merry misery don't you say somethin', Seth?" he finally demanded, in anger.

"Haven't anything to say," was the quiet answer.

"Then it's about time ye had, that's all. How are we goin' to get out of here? Come, tune up, now, if you ever did."

"I'm busy thinkin'."

"Thinkin'! What does it amount to?"

"What does all your fussing and talking amount to? You are no nearer out than I am, are you?"

"No, but—"

"And I haven't been making half the fuss. Just keep your shirt on for a while and maybe I'll hit upon a plan that will work."

"That's all right; but what's the use of our havin' our hands tied like this? I'll try and free yours with my teeth while you are thinkin'. Reckon there's no use to holler fer help, or they wouldn't have give us the use of our tongues."

Seth faced around to allow Harry a chance to try his plan, and while Harry worked away with his teeth Seth worked away with his brains to study some plan by which they might effect their escape.

Harry had no trifling task to perform, for the cords were strong and had been well tied, but at the end of half an hour he had chewed several of them in two and Seth's hands were free.

"There you are, Stoick!" Harry cried, with his usual laugh, "and if you have done as well with your think-masheen as I have done with my teeth, we'll stand a chance for gettin' out."

"That was a good job," Seth complimented. "Now I'll free you with my knife, like this, and then I'll tell you something that has come to me."

"Quite a speech for you, Seth; but, I s'pose you have somethin' to say or you wouldn't talk. Go ahead."

Having now their hands free, both felt in better spirits.

"Yes, I've got something to say, Harry. We are on the ground floor—"

"And that's said to be the best place to get in. That's what most fellers are after."

"I've got the floor. We can't get out by the window, for these are iron shutters, and they're locked. Our only chance is by the door. That is locked. But, we are no weaklings, and can kick like mules if we try—"

"Stoick, put it there! That is what I have been trying to get through my hair all along. You are a philosopher, for a fact. We'll kick out a couple or two of panels, and then demolish a plate glass in front and we're free—"

"And get gobbled the minute we crawl out eh? Hardly. Once we get out into the main room there, we'll be able to get to the roof—"

"Come on, my deaf an' dumb cherub, and we'll kick worse'n mugwumps at a ward primary."

Their plan laid, they backed up to the door, and taking hold of each other for support, planted their heels against one of the panels with telling force.

But, the door was a stout one, and it was some moments before they could make any impression upon it. Pretty soon, though, the panel began to crack and splinter, and then gave way.

"Bully for us!" cried Harry. "E Pluribus Unum and git thar!"

A few more kicks removed the remaining splinters, and there was a hole big enough for them to crawl through with ease.

They were not long in availing themselves of the chance, and were safe in the outer and larg-

er apartment, from which an open stairs led the way to the floor above.

"Come and let's try the front door first," Harry suggested. "Maybe there will be a show for getting out there, and we'll save time."

"We haven't any time to waste," reminded Seth. "No telling when they will be back here again."

They found the front doors locked, of course, and examination of the windows told them it would never do to break one of them unless as a very last resort, for it would draw attention and get them into further trouble.

That being the case they mounted the stairs to the next floor to look around there.

Here, at a glance, they saw the prospect was better.

The windows in front were fastened with only ordinary inside catches, and they overlooked a broad awning.

To open one, climb out upon the awning, and so gain the street, would be no more than play for two active lads such as they, and they accepted the plan at sight and put it into operation.

In two minutes both were safely upon the ground.

They were seen coming down the awning frame, of course, and a man demanded to know what they had been up to.

"We have only been up to the second story," answered Harry, with one of his happy laughs, and without waiting to be questioned further he and Seth took themselves out of that neighborhood.

They had been quick to note the part of the city they were in, and lost no time in getting back to the office, adopting such disguises as they always had with them for emergency. They had not been absent more than an hour, all told. It had been a speedy and fortunate escape for them.

CHAPTER XV.

COMING TO A HEAD.

On the way to the office Harry and Seth talked the matter over at length.

They could know nothing about the loss of the papers, but they could understand that the woman's story of robbery had been a "fake."

As the Santvoord case was the only one the combination had on hand just at that time, they reasoned that this had something to do with that, and laid their plans for action in case they did not meet their chief at the office.

When they arrived the door was locked, and Billy absent.

"That settles it," said Harry. "We'll now wade in and do our little part if it takes the freckles off."

Seth was of the same mind, and as soon as they had written a note to inform Billy what had happened and what they were going to do, they set out.

Broadway Billy, as has been shown, had taken them into the case with him, giving them all the details of it and telling them of his suspicions, so they knew what to do almost as well as he could have told them.

They looked upon Conrad Hodgerson as the one who had been at the bottom of their misadventures, and decided to get on his track as soon as they could.

So, carefully disguised, they made their way to the Hodgerson mansion.

They had not been gone a great while when Billy arrived at the office again, after his last interview with the colored girl.

He found the note the boys had left, and his indignation rose as he read it. He saw the workings of a carefully arranged scheme, and saw that the Hodgersons were doing their best to beat him and be the first to secure the iron box.

Would they succeed?

They should not, if he could prevent, and he thought he could. True, they held a strong hand now, if the missing papers were in their possession, but they had not the full clew, without the paper he had last received from the colored girl, and it was certain that they would get no help from her.

After thinking the matter over for some minutes he resolved to play a bold bluff.

Sitting down at his desk he dashed off several notices, all worded the same, of which this is a copy:

"DEAR SIR:—"

"You are respectfully requested to be present at the residence of the late Elijah Santvoord at ten o'clock on Tuesday next to witness the opening of the iron box, according to the will of Mr. Santvoord."

"Yours truly,

"WILLIAM WESTON."

It was a bold play, but it had its purpose.

For one thing, it would lead them to believe the box had already come into his possession, and it might put a check to further search. If not that, it might disconcert the rascals and balk some of their further plans.

These notices he addressed to all parties concerned, and sent them out by a messenger.

That done, he left a note for his "team" and set forth anew.

When Harry and Seth came in the neighborhood of the Hodgerson residence they were in time to see Conrad Hodgerson and Tim Rittlers enter the house.

They knew Tim Rittlers, having had another case in which he had figured, and the whole scheme came to their minds at sight of him. He it was who had been the means of their getting into trouble.

"That's the brains of the combination, Seth," Harry declared. "If we can dump him we will boost the boss along bigly. Have got to get up and hustle to do it, though, for Billy says he's no slouch."

Seth shrugged his shoulders as if to imply that he was ready regardless of the risks.

They stationed themselves to watch the house, and waited.

With the reader's privilege we may enter.

When the pair went in, Conrad conducted Rittlers to the library where the elder rascal was still waiting for his son's return.

The rascally ex-detective was the coolest of the three, and immediately assumed first position. It was plain to the others that they had a man to deal with who meant to make all he could out of the case.

After some preliminary talk, Rittlers said:

"Well, I now hold the winning hand. The boys have been taken care of, and Broadway Billy weakened. They were his leading trumps in every game. Then, too, I am in possession of that secret letter, now secret no longer, and am ready to search for the iron box."

"Then let us have it at once," urged the elder rascal, thrown off his guard and showing his eagerness in every word.

The ex-detective smiled.

"That box is vastly important to you, Mr. Hodgerson," he remarked. "I can see that. How much will you bid for it?"

"See here," cried Conrad. "I made the bargain with you, and that has got to stand. You are to have five hundred dollars, and not another cent. Take that or drop the case."

"That's it," agreed Baptist. "We care nothing about it."

"Very well, then," said Rittlers, coolly, "I'll find it on my own account and take the whole. The cards are all in my hands. Neither of you has read that secret letter, and neither has the slightest clew to work upon. I am the only one who holds the key."

The father and son exchanged glances.

"This is an outrage!" cried Conrad. "I didn't think it of you, Tim. You have always acted on the square before—"

"And I'll do so this time, but the game is worth more than you have offered, and I want more. Promise me two thousand dollars in addition to the five hundred, and I'll serve you like a slave and ask no questions. I'll deliver the box into your hands unopened."

Another exchange of glances.

"Do you swear to that?" asked Hodgerson the elder.

"I do."

"Well, consider it a bargain. I'll give you that sum on the conditions you yourself have named."

"That settles it. We'll have it in writing, if you please, so there can be no chance for a dispute, and then we'll get down to business."

At this the others demurred, but the rascal was firm, so it was settled in that way.

"Now I'm ready to go ahead," Rittlers said. "I have the papers, it is true, but there is a Rosa Polkadot who has a part of the clew. We must make use of her or we cannot find it. Do you know her?"

He was told who she was.

"Good. We must force her to disclose the secret to us, or we must take her prisoner and hold her till she is glad enough to do so. I do not believe the box can be found without her help."

"Why didn't you say so before?"

"I had my reasons. Now, how does this strike you? We will decoy young Santvoord away from the house, and then Conrad here and I will go there and make the girl disclose what she knows. We may find the box, and if we do that will settle the whole matter. If we do not, then we can make a prisoner of the girl and so balk Broadway Billy."

"That is a good scheme," approved the old man.

They had been now talking a long time. What we have quoted was only the pith of their conversation.

While they were still engaged there came a ring at the bell, and a messenger was announced with a message for Mr. Hodgerson. The order was given for the lad to be brought to the library.

When Hodgerson read the message his face assumed the hue of death.

"It's all up," he gasped, and letting fall the paper he dropped back in his chair.

Rittlers caught up the paper quickly and read it. The effect it had upon the elder Hodgerson told him how important the box was to him, and he regretted at once that he had not made his demand five thousand dollars.

"Don't give up!" he said coolly. "If he has got the box, there is time for us to wrest it from him between now and Tuesday. If he hasn't got it, a visit at once to the house will prove it. He couldn't get it without the aid of that girl, that I know."

"And we have the letter," reminded Conrad. Their arrangements were quickly made.

Using the same messenger, a decoy message was sent to Palmer Santvoord, and after he had gone Conrad and the ex-detective set forth.

Needless to say the Beagles were upon their track.

Their game was a shrewd one, but, it was destined to failure, for Broadway Billy had still the lead in the race.

Leaving his office as last mentioned, he set out for the Santvoord residence again with more haste than on the other occasions, with an important object in view.

Knowing what he knew now, he believed the Hodgersons would soon make a raid there for the purpose of gaining possession of the iron box, if they could find it, and he wanted to warn the colored girl.

Not that he was afraid that she would reveal anything, but for her own safety.

Before he reached the house, though, he met Palmer Santvoord coming away in something of haste.

They stopped and Palmer's face showed surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "I was just coming to your office in response to your summons."

"Why, that summons was for next Tuesday, and at your house—"

"No, no. Read this."

Billy read:

"MR. SANTVOORD:—

"Come to my office in all haste. Have news of greatest importance for you."

"WILLIAM WESTON."

Broadway Billy smiled.

"This is a decoy!" he explained. "I never wrote it. The object of it was to get you out of the house while a search was made for the iron box. I suspected it, and was on my way there to take a hand in it. Come on!"

Palmer turned about and accompanied him, and they lost no time in getting back to the house.

As they drew near, Billy felt a touch upon his arm, and Silent Seth was at his side. And, as a hasty look around discovered, Harry was not far off.

"They are in the house, sir," Seth informed. "Tom Rittlers and Conrad Hodgerson. They have not been there many minutes, and we were lying in wait for them when they come out."

"Good!" cried Billy. "Come right along, and we'll take a hand in the search. Here is a chance that must not be missed."

CHAPTER XVI.

BILLY GETS THE BULGE.

BILLY did not like the idea of ringing the bell, for he wanted to take the rascals by surprise, but there did not seem to be any other way, so they mounted the steps for that purpose.

Fortune favored him. Just as he was about to lay hand upon the bell-pull, the door opened and the old housekeeper stepped out.

The young detective took advantage of the opportunity, and clapping a hand over the woman's mouth he pushed her back into the hall, and Palmer, Harry and Seth stepped quickly in.

Palmer secured the door silently, while Billy still held the woman, and that done, assisted the boys in binding her.

She was taken into the parlor and laid on a sofa, where she was as comfortable as circum-

stances would allow, and where she was likely to remain till she was removed.

High words had been heard coming from the little rear sitting-room, and Billy and his three comrades now made their way in that direction. They stopped at the door.

"I tell you you *shall* disclose this secret!" Tim Rittlers was heard saying. "If you do not, it will be the worse for you."

"I will not disclose it," was Rosa Polkadot's firm response. "In fact, I could not do it if I would, for I do not know it. Nothing but the papers can give the secret."

"You lie!" cried the ex-detective. "What means this mention of your name, if you know nothing about it?"

"I have already disclosed all I know to the right person, sir."

"To Broadway Billy, do you mean?"

"To Mr. Weston."

There was a pause, and the two men looked at each other.

"We don't believe you," declared Conrad.

"Unless you take us immediately to the hiding-place of that box, you must come with us as a prisoner."

"Do as you please about that, for I am in your power," was the defiant retort. "Even if you kill me for it, you could not make me tell what I do not know, and what I would not tell if I did know."

Broadway Billy was well pleased with what he heard.

At this point of the game he threw open the door, and he and those with him confronted the guilty pair.

At sight of him Tim Rittlers leaped back and his hand flew to his hip, but with a quicker movement Broadway Billy had a revolver out and pointed at him.

"Think twice before you try that," he cried. "This is the way they do that sort of thing out West, and you are too slow. Bring your hand around to sight at once—quick!"

With a growl the rascal obeyed.

"Now, my boys," Billy ordered, "search them and take away their weapons."

Which was quickly done, and a revolver was taken from each, the rascals eying the lads as they proceeded, wondering how they had been discovered and released.

As soon as they had been disarmed, Billy put handcuffs upon the rascally ex-detective, saying as he did so:

"You undertook a big game, my scamp detective, but it did not work. This time you will get what you escaped before. And you, Hodgerson, I cannot arrest now, but you are to remain here for the present."

Young Hodgerson was pale, but the ex-detective was black with rage.

Billy searched the latter, and discovered upon him the papers that had been taken from his office, together with the written agreement he had so recently made with the Hodgersons.

"This is case enough," the young detective exclaimed, gladly. "There is no chance for any one to squirm out of the consequences."

He pocketed the papers carefully.

"Now, Harry and Seth, and you, Mr. Santvoord," he said, "please remain here for the present, while I go with this brave girl to look for the box. Come, Rosa, and we will now see if it can be found."

Together they left the room, and the girl led the way to the cellar.

Here she lighted the gas, and told Billy to examine the papers in the manner she had before suggested.

Holding the papers up to the light, Billy put one over the other in the manner indicated by arrow-heads on each, and at once a definite direction was disclosed. A single line on each paper made now a cross, and over it read:

"***look there."

It was the ending of that puzzling sentence he had seen so many times, and the last word was right at the cross.

"And is this a plan of the cellar?" Billy asked.

He looked around as he put the question, comparing the paper, but it did not appear to be quite the same.

"Here is the last help I can give you," said the girl, in reply. "Mr. Santvoord said I was to say to you here, *Look up!*"

It was all that was needed, for at once Billy recognized that the map was a plan of the overhead of the cellar instead of a ground plan, as any one would naturally have expected to find.

"And now I can remain no longer," the girl added. "It must be you alone to discover the box. This was the orders, so that if you wanted to leave it where it is you could safely do so."

I have done my part; the rest is with you and I have no part in it."

She withdrew, and Billy watched her until she had gone from sight.

"A good girl," he said to himself, "and one to be trusted. Mr. Santvoord knew what he was about."

Following the directions of the map, now that the whole clew was his, he soon located the cross on the paper as identical with one corner of one of the large chimneys which rested upon the cellar bottom.

There was nothing to indicate that there was anything false about the chimney whatever, but a very close inspection showed him that one of the upper corner sections was movable. That was enough. He did not disturb it, but put out the gas and went up to the floor above.

"Did you find it?" asked Palmer, at once.

"I did," was the answer. "And here is what I do now."

With his words he took the letters and maps, and in the plain sight of all, burned them to ashes in the grate!

"That settles it," he said. "Without these, no man could find that box, and I alone hold the secret. Not even this colored girl knows where the iron box is. No man, save me, can put his hand on it."

"Curse you!" grated Conrad; "I'll have it if I have to tear down the house to get it."

"I don't agree with you," said Billy. "Mr. Santvoord here is going to see to it that it is not searched for further, and he will employ competent watchmen to guard the house."

"That is what I will do," the young man affirmed.

And that was what he did do.

Broadway Billy had not seen the iron box, 'twas true, but he had full confidence that it was there.

Everything else had been disclosed with such exactness, and Santvoord's device had been so thorough, that there was no doubt upon that point. That he should find the box when it was wanted he felt sure.

He took Rittlers into custody at once, but allowed young Hodgerson to go, as there was nothing yet upon which to hold him.

When he had disposed of his prisoner, he sought an interview with the superintendent, and to that admirable master of men told the whole story.

Upon his advice men were set to shadow the Hodgersons—which was a good idea, as it afterward turned out.

They had quietly made their arrangements, and on the day before the opening of the iron box attempted to leave the city, but were stopped.

At the last moment two men touched them upon their shoulders, and a hint that they had better remain at home for the present was sufficient to turn them back. They understood.

On a Tuesday morning, at ten o'clock, there was a gathering at the residence of the late Elijah Santvoord.

Broadway Billy was the chief personage of the occasion, and next to him, perhaps, was Lawyer Bryland. The others were those whom Billy had requested to attend.

There was Baptist Hodgerson and his son Conrad, as bold as lions. There was Abiel Trotterman, with his daughter Lucrece. And there was Palmer Santvoord, together with Rosa Polkadot.

Besides these were many others: Happy Harry, Silent Seth, Mrs. Morseley, Mrs. Woods, Cyrus Durand, Henry Burringer, and others. The company was a goodly one, and at the hour named all had arrived.

Broadway Billy then addressed them, stating the object of the meeting, and ended by saying that he would withdraw with Mr. Santvoord to bring the iron box privately, since its hiding-place was a secret which only Mr. Santvoord had the right to know.

So, these two retired to the cellar, and the iron box was found where Billy had expected to find it, in the cavity of the chimney.

The place was one young Santvoord had never suspected, and he was astonished.

It was a secret he would keep.

The box was carried into the parlor, where all the company was, and there it was laid on a table and Billy prepared to open it.

Just how that was to be done, however, did not appear, but it was soon made plain, for Rosa Polkadot stepped forward and put a small key into Billy's hand.

With that he unlocked the little box and threw open the lid.

Every neck was craned forward, and especially

eager were Baptist Hodgerson and his rascally son.

The first thing Billy took out was a letter, which he found was addressed to himself, and he so announced. At that moment an exciting scene took place.

The now desperate Hodgersons, father and son, sprung forward together, and, seizing the papers which the box contained, were about to tear them to pieces, but Broadway Billy had a revolver at the head of each in an instant.

"Drop the papers!" he cried. "Or the worse for you! Quick!"

His ringing order was startling, and the cravens dropped the papers to the floor and slunk back to their places.

Billy then directed Lawyer Bryland to gather the papers up, which was done, and the investigation proceeded.

CHAPTER XVII.

TELLS WHAT THE BOX CONTAINED.

"It is plain enough," Billy remarked, "that these gentlemen," indicating the Hodgersons, "know what this box contains. It is something they have reason to fear, as I have been aware for some time. I forbid their leaving the room until all has been revealed. They will be wanted, I opine."

He turned again to the box.

The next he took out was a large packet of bank bills, addressed to himself. And following that was a similar packet for Rosa Polkadot. That was all.

Taking then the letter that was addressed to himself, he opened it and read it aloud. It ran like this:

"TO WILLIAM WESTON:—

"The accompanying papers reveal the truth concerning a long hidden crime. I carried the secret until I could bear it no longer, and have killed myself, though no one suspected that. In life I was not permitted to reveal it and live; in death I can reveal it and fear nothing. Make it known."

"ELIJAH SANTVOORD."

Palmer Santvoord and his sisters turned away their heads, in their new sorrow, but this was hardly noticed, for there was immediately a groan and a heavy fall, and Baptist Hodgerson was found writhing on the floor.

He was picked up, but he expired in a few moments.

His son stood by with folded arms, with a sinister smile upon his sinister face, and for a few moments all was excitement.

Conrad's coolness was noted, and he was asked to explain.

"He said he would do it, failing to destroy the papers," he said. "He has taken his own life, that is all there is of it. No worse than Mr. Santvoord did."

The stern business of the hour had to be carried out, and when the dead man had been laid on a lounge the lawyer read the other papers, those addressed to Mr. Hodgerson and Mr. Trotterman. The latter gentleman, by the way, sat with covered face, trembling for what was to come.

The paper addressed to Hodgerson was read first.

It spoke to him in scathing terms, and declared his power was broken. It said that proof of his crime was in the hands of Mr. Trotterman, who would expose him fully. Or if not, then the detective would do it. It closed by saying that he, Santvoord, hoped that the few minutes he, Hodgerson, would suffer, would be enough to teach him what he, Santvoord, had suffered for years.

Then came the reading of the one addressed to Trotterman.

It was headed—

"CONFESSION OF A COWARD."

It was much greater in length than can be quoted here, so a mere outline of it only can be given.

The crime had been this: Hodgerson had murdered Basil Trotterman, the father of the present Abiel, for his money. Santvoord had discovered the crime, and was about to expose it, when Hodgerson caught him and threatened his life if he did so. Hodgerson forced a portion of the money upon Santvoord, and warned him that if he ever said a word about it he should die.

Santvoord hesitated, since Hodgerson was a more powerful man than he, and, at that, Hodgerson accused him of being as guilty as himself, by taking the bribe, and thus held him doubly in his power. The crime beggared Abiel Trotterman, while it enriched Hodgerson, but for years Santvoord was Trotterman's mainstay and support, he thus in some measure

doing penance for his part in the crime. But, at last, he could bear it no longer, and took this means of exposing it after death.

"My friend, my dear friend!" cried Trotterman, at the close of the reading, "I can now understand him. He is guiltless, *guiltless!* But, youder wretch, who has dissembled before me all these years, he was unworthy the name of man!"

"And it is well for him that he has passed beyond the reach of the law," declared the lawyer.

Hodgerson was buried, and his son quickly disposed of his property and disappeared.

Palmer Santvoord and Lucrece Trotterman were married, and the story of the crime was never mentioned between them.

With them Mr. Trotterman is ending his days in peace and happiness, and he loves Palmer for the love his father bore him during all the years he carried that heavy secret.

Tim Rittlers and all his rascally crew were punished as they deserved, Lawyer Bryland putting the law upon them with all the force he could bring to bear, and the city was well rid of the villainous gang. Nobody shed any tears when they took the train for their up-river home.

And Broadway Billy and his brave Beagles? They are at the old stand, ready for anything that turns up. Billy fairly worships his boy allies, and they declare no detective on earth is to be compared with their chief. All together, they are a Big Three, and well may evil-doers tremble when they turn their attention upon them. They are "p'izen" to crime, crooks, and bad men generally.

THE END.

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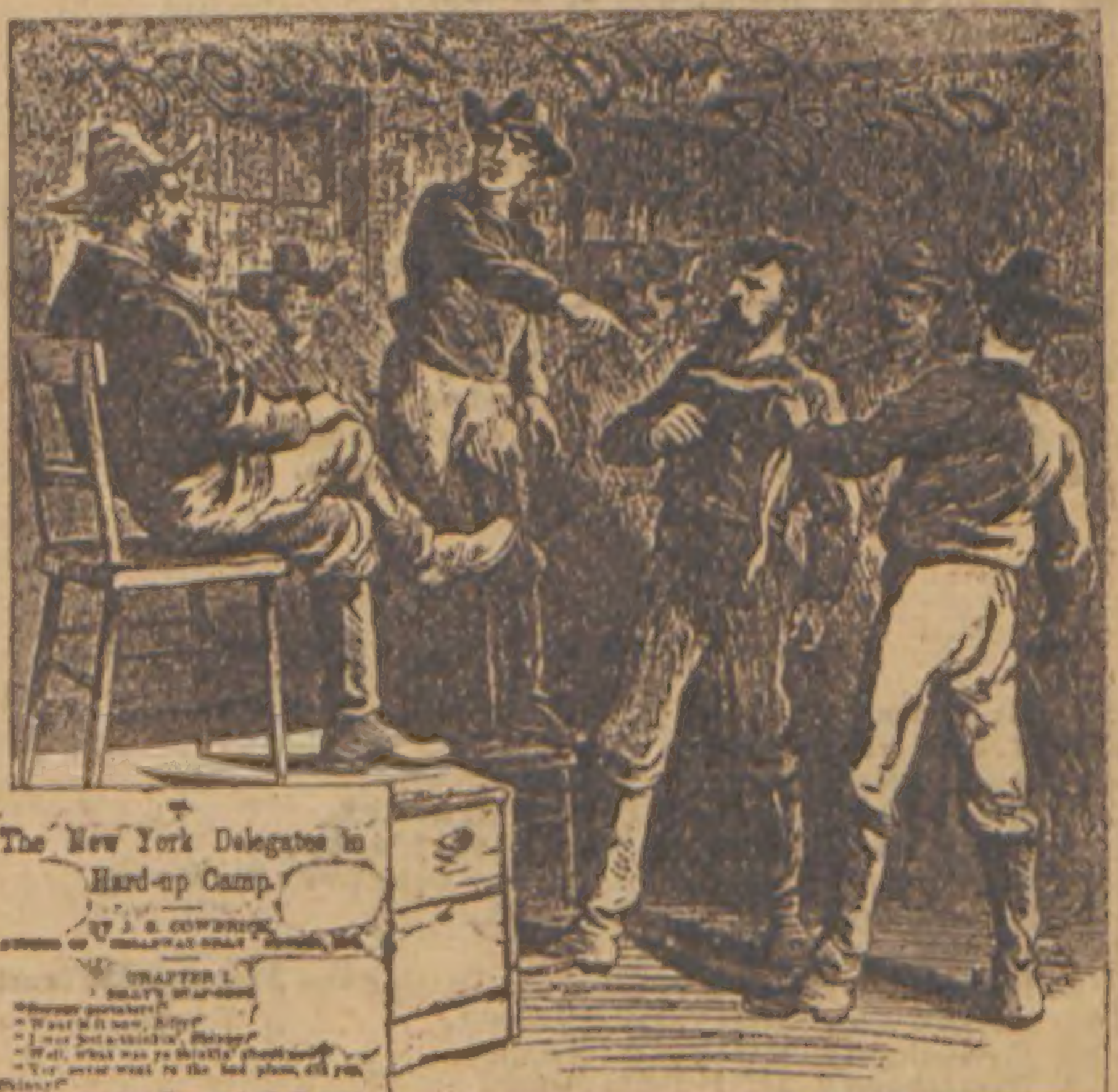


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